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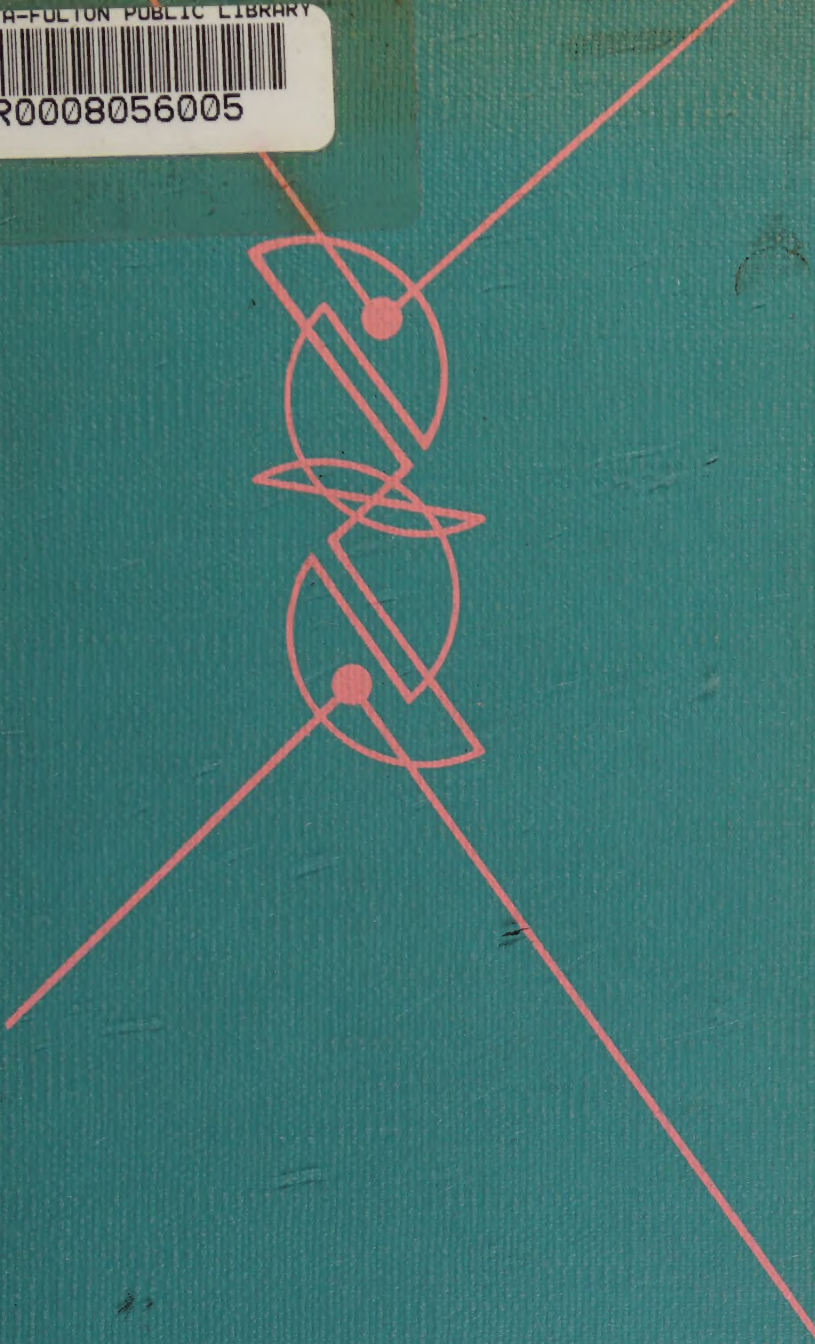

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PALLIETER

ANTON PIELH

FELIX TIMMERMANS

PALLIETER

TRANSLATED BY C.B. BODDE

INTRODUCTION BY
HENDRICK WILLEM VAN LOON

WITH MANY DRAWINGS BY
ANTON PIECK

HARPER & BROTHERS
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PALLIETER

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INTRODUCTION

Now that I come to think of it, when exactly did "Pallieter" first appear?

Was it in the fall of 1914 when the unfamiliar sound of the booming guns made us reach gratefully for anything printed that might cause us to forget, if for a moment, the ghastly fate of old Flanders?

Was it in the autumn of 1917 when the syncopation of death no longer drew a shiver from the shyest horse along the frontier?

I have forgotten, and it does not matter.

This book is bound to neither time nor place.

The antithesis of his brooding cousin Hamlet, young Pallieter goes forth to meet the world with a smile.

Not the grin of ingratiating subservience, but the loud, broad laughter of an honest man whose pocket is empty, whose soul is free of care, and who has noticed that the birds sing for rich and poor alike.

* * * * *

As for Timmermans himself, if you want to see him, here he is.

He made the picture himself and he ought to know the subject. He has lived with it for a good many years.

What does he do with himself?

He writes and he draws and sometimes he plays a little music.

Often he does nothing at all but sit and smoke and think.

Sometimes he just sits and smokes.

And sometimes he just sits.

As you may see by contemplating exhibit B.

His workshop is in a corner of the old Beguinage of Lier and his neighbors are the quiet little Beguins whose life he has described with such wonderful understanding.

And when he gets bored, he can walk by the banks of the river Nethe and pass the time of day with the pastor and with the notary and the other dignitaries of a little town that gained fame when "pallieter" was added to the vocabulary of Belgium and Holland and either as a verb or a noun was used to indicate and describe that

[1] These pictures by van Loon were made at Timmermans's home in Lier, Belgium, Christmas Day, 1923.

healthy sentiment which in the days before the war we used to call the "joy of living."

* * * * *

What shall I tell you of the man?

I have spent some very happy hours with him.

But we sat and smoked and we each had a little box with paint, and we drew beautiful pictures, like two good children who have been invited to a coloring party. (They had such things in the day of my youth.)

We have written letters to each other. And we have pallietered in ease and have cursed in a noble flow of our respective tongues.

But everything that Timmermans thinks and believes and holds to be true is in his book. And I am not going to spoil the fun of the literary treasure-hunter by shouting, "Hey, Mister, look on page umteedee. There you will find it."

* * * * *

During the war and in the days of Versailles, a great deal of sense and an infinitely greater amount of

nonsense was printed and preached about nationality.

The era of good-will toward the small political unit seems to have come to an end. The practical man inspects the map of Europe and says:

"What is the good of all this? Organization, simplification, efficient cooperation, that is what we need."

Perhaps so.

Meanwhile I am deeply grateful to these humble workers in the unprofitable vineyard of the "little languages" who patiently tend those flowers which sometimes come to break the monotony of our own standardized landscape.

Pallieter is here and I wish him Godspeed.

Let us be grateful that the Flemish quota had not been exhausted!

HENDRIK WILLEM VAN LOON.

Westport, Conn., Spring, 1924.

PALLIETER

CHAPTER ONE

A FINE MORNING IN MAY

HE spring was in a poor way those first days of May. The sun sulked behind clouds, only looking through now and then just to let a few golden streaks fall on the yellow buttercups.

The bright young green that had rushed out on all sides to meet her, in the grass, the trees and hedgerow, now waited impatiently for her caress.

Pallieter was quite put out of temper.

"It looks as if the game 's up."

But the same evening the moon rose, breaking through the clouds ruddy as an apple; a thin mist lay on the river and meadows like a bit of delicate gauze. When Pallieter saw that, he wet his forefinger and held it up! it cooled to the south, and he laughed and rolled in the grass and sang with joy, his voice floated across the river through the quiet evening air:

"I know who'll wake me from my sleep,
O nightingale that sings so sweet
The whole night long.
And down the valley I'll take my way
To greet the flowers at break of day . . . !"

And next morning the sun shone!

Half the night he had lain awake, his window wide open, and watched the clouds break up till the heavens became a clear blue strewn with pale stars and filled to the brim with moonlight. Into the pure and quiet splendor, while the dew dropped slowly down on the earth, up rose the throbbing notes of a young nightingale. Pallieter quivered, he thought of the sun now at the other side of the world among the Chinese and dusky folk. To-morrow it would shine again on the fair valley of the Nethe and put new life into the trees and plants and make the flowers swell and smell richly, the woods would be quivering with the piping, twittering and caroling of birds—and he, Pallieter, would grow a foot in stature. He bounded in his bed till the clothes slipped off his limbs; then crept under again and fell asleep with a smile on his face.

When the first glimmer of daylight showed through the eastern sky and a cock crowed, Pallieter sprang out of bed, threw off his shirt, and ran down to the river mother-naked. A gray mist hung over the ground and shrouded the trees, the air was quiet as death, the barley was still weighed down with a heavy dew, and large drops were pattering off the trees.

Pallieter took a run and jumped straight into the deep water, dived, and came up in midstream panting, gleaming wet, and happy. The cool water made his blood surge vigorously and he laughed uproariously.

He swam against the stream and let himself drift back; he swam dog-fashion, turned over and splashed, threw out his limbs till the water swirled and rippled and the reeds and rushes bent and quivered.

Gradually, with the increase of daylight, the mist had grown thicker and whiter and swallowed up the ground unperceived. The trees were now alive with the twittering of birds, and the reviving scent of flowers filtered through the mist. There yonder across the Nethe rose up the great sun red as a tomato flashing into all the whiteness like a sudden burst of fire.

Pallieter's heart leaped at the sight and he shouted, with tears in his eyes, "It will be a glorious day to-day," and he spattered a thousand drops into the air! Then he dived once more as if in search of a treasure to bring away with him, and then set off shining and ruddy through the white mist, trolling out:

"An ox goes through my vineyard—
Steady, steady Jadam,
Adam he had seven sons,
Seven sons had Adam."

He was in his bedroom again when the convent bell rang out clearly over the white fields and he heard Charlot stumble hurriedly down the stairs.

Charlot always stayed in her room till she heard Pal-

lieter back in his own, for once she had caught sight of him coming in, stark naked, and with a shriek of horror she had rushed back into her bedroom. That she could not stand; she would even rather be late for mass, or miss it altogether, than meet a man bare as God made him, in God's own daylight.

When Pallieter was dressed he went downstairs, lighted the stove, and set the brass kettle on the fire, and ground the coffee. When the water began to steam and rumble, he made the coffee. What a blessed smell! It did the heart good! Its fragrance was absorbed into the spring air that filled the room, and Pallieter snuffed it up like a dog.

The sky cleared. A streak of sunlight crept cunningly through the open window and danced glittering on the brass pans and the gilded bright-colored mantle of a wax image of the Virgin on the chimney-piece.

Pallieter thrust out his finger into the splash of gold and said, "'Tis brighter than honey!" He cut slices of bread and spread them half an inch thick with the good butter, and fetched out of the cellar a dish full of snow-white cheese.

He went into the garden, still wet with dew and flecked with splashes of sunlight, to pluck some radishes. Loebas with her four pups rushed out of the kennel and yelped round his legs. He gave them each a lump of

sugar and they shuffled like mad over the wet grass plot.

While he was washing the radishes, Peter, the stork, came flying to his nest with a silvery fish in his beak for his mate, who was sitting on her eggs.

When all was ready for breakfast he went and stood at the back door and watched the sun spreading out over the landscape. What a feast it was for sight and smell and hearing, the pale green wholesome earth with the silver thread of the Nethe wandering through it and the voices of the birds, the cuckoo and the cock crowing! What could be better than this? . . .

Pallieter opened the front door as well, so that a cool breeze rushed through the passage, and he could see the just-awakened world through both openings.

At one end the far stretch of fields and meadows with purple woods, and windmills on the horizon—and through the front door the rampart, the convent beyond, blossoming orchards, and irregular roofs, and the yellow tower of St. Gommarus Church, that was just chiming the quarter.

Its clear notes seemed to proclaim the land's well-being.

"It doesn't ring long enough," said Pallieter, and he seized the bell rope in the passage and pulled at it so lustily that the bell in the little tower hardly had time

to swing up and down and the mighty clang rolled booming over the morning landscape. He pulled and pulled as if to send the sound to the other side of the world, and he laughed and watched the convent and the meadows.

After that, in honor of the fine weather, he hoisted a big white flag in the front garden; the wind ruffled it and the sun caressed it.

It was overwhelming, the outpour of bird song, whistling, twittering among the big trees on the ramparts. And there was Charlot coming from mass, her face full of peace and her prayer book under her arm. Pallieter sang out as he saw her:

"Will you dance, little nun? Will you dance?"

"It's going to be a fine day, my lad."

"Such weather's thrown away on nuns."

"I'm not a nun."

"You're a deal too fat for that. Why don't you eat less?"

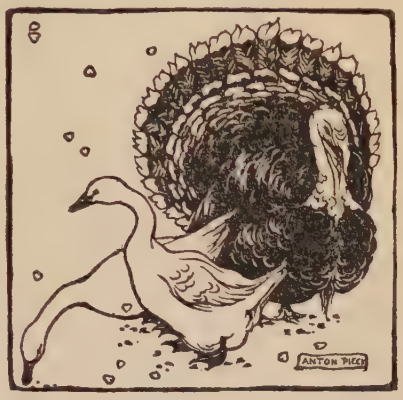
"Why should I?" she said, angrily, and flounced into the kitchen to change her dress. She came back in a blue woolen skirt and red bodice, her arms bursting out of the tight sleeves, plump and shiny.

They drank their coffee, spreading the soft cheese an inch thick on the long slices of bread, dipped the pungent radishes into the cheese and salt, and sipped and slobbered like a pair of infants.

While eating, Pallieter kept his eyes on the shoulder of the hill, from behind which the sun was climbing into sight; they were already at work there in the fields. The red sails of the windmill were being set in motion by the

fresh wind that dispersed the mists and sent a single white billow of cloud afloat in the heavenly blue, while the scent of the white and crimson carnation in front of the window wafted over the breakfast table.

Pallieter swallowed the last of his food, waved his arms, and called out, while Charlot let her eyelids fall and murmured a paternoster: "O Lord, my belly jumps with joy like a grasshopper. It is as if thou hadst placed a concertina within me."



He went out of doors, set open the dovecotes and the fowl house, and scattered maize, rice, oats, and corn. There was a flutter, cluttering, cackling, and flapping of wings; all sorts of fowls were there—pouter pigeons and fantails, cocks and hens, geese, turkeys, and a splendid peacock. Greedily they packed up the food; they pushed and crowded and spread themselves out and pecked at the sparrows that swooped down on the heaving mass in flocks.

What a fine sight it was in the silvery sunlight, the gleaming necks on which brown, green, blue, and red gold flashed incessantly; the white-brown-gray speckling of the wings; the red and yellow beaks and feet; the vermilion combs; the arching waving tails glancing and shimmering like the iridescence of seashells! Pallieter

watched it all with half-shut eyes and said, "Even Rubens . . . couldn't paint it!"

When the best part of the food had been pecked up the birds dispersed each their own way, to the dung heap the stable, or the bleaching-ground. The pigeons flew off to the dewy fields in flapping crowds, and the peacock stepped proudly and delicately down the path into the sweet-smelling garden and unfolded his wide-spreading tail in all its glory of many colors.

Pallieter stood admiring him, so beautiful among the delicate young green under the white and rosy blossom of the fruit trees, and how the sunlight made it all look as rich and rare as a fairy-tale.

All at once the peacock flew up and alighted in the top of an apple tree, his tail falling over the blushing blossom like a green flame, and he rent the quiet air three times with his hideous screeching.

Pallieter turned on the water tap and immediately a little fountain sprang up out of the blue pond where the goldfish were darting about. Then he filled his pipe and fetched an enormous goat out of the stable. It was

coal-black he-goat with a blue shimmer on its skin; it ad yellow horns and light-gray eyes, and was called ucifer.

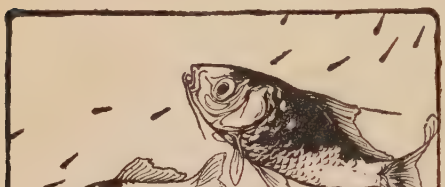
As the beast came outside it snuffed up the fresh air nd began to caper off, but Pal-eter seized it by the horns, arew his leg over its back, ghted his pipe, and, firmly ated on Lucifer, who tossed nd jerked his head, rode out of ie yard. Pallieter clapped his ands and the five dogs came ushing out, scrambling and run-ing on ahead of them. The goat arried Pallieter through the ack gateway that came out on ie banks of the Nethe, and fol-owed the winding river path.

And on all sides of them the splendor of the earth was pread out, steeped in sunshine, bright with the vivid reen of May, melting away into the horizon in silvery ue mists. It did a man's soul good to look at it. Every-here the scene was painted with green and brown atches, with here and there brilliant splashes of yellow urnip flowers.

The fields of barley were swept white by the light ind, and through it all wound the Nethe's silver thread f swift cool water.

The air, jubilant with the trilling of birds, was filled ith delicious fragrance, and the trees along the river-

side looked as fresh and bright as if they had just risen out of the ground. On the broad leaves of the plantain by the water's edge, big dewdrops shone and sparkled like diamonds. Pallieter plucked a leaf as he passed, put it to his lips, and let the drops roll into his mouth.



"Good!" he said. "It tastes of heaven!"

All around the mighty earth was yielding up her treasures, plants, flowers, beans, and carrots, all kinds of fruits; everywhere creatures awakening to life, others pairing; the air smelled like honey, and a manure cart was dripping into the ground.

This was life, forever giving, forever reproducing; as the one thing bursts into life, another is already being formed. Forever moving forward in circles, one thing making room for another, and though you may have the Ten Commandments at your finger ends, and you may think about it till your hair turns gray, you'll never find out the why and wherefore of it.

"But that's no matter," said Pallieter; "it's beautiful, let's enjoy it all. . . ." And with the taste of apple pie and cherries still in his mouth, he looked at the pink-and-white blossoming trees. His heart overflowed with well-being. Nothing was to be heard but now and then the singing of some young farmer or the neigh of one

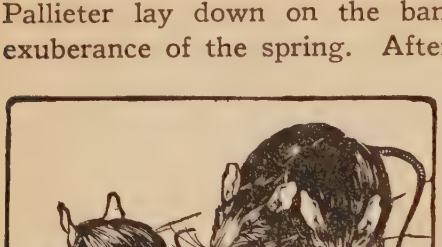
of the white or brown horses. The blade of a plow flashed in the sunlight and a fisherman on the river bank jerked up his net with the silver fish sparkling in it. A swallow swooped from one side of the river to the other; the dogs frolicked through the meadows, jumped over the brooks, and rolled about in the fresh grass, nibbling off the tips as they ran. Their barking resounded through the air with the crow of cocks and hum of bees, and up in the blue heavens there hung a delicate plume of little white clouds.

Pallieter muttered to himself, "Why, the earth has gone crazy like a love-sick maid!" and he, too, was moved by this same fierce rush of up-welling life. He took his ebony flute out of his pocket and played a gay tune that went tripping away over the meadows as if Spring herself was singing.

Pallieter's heart was light. He broke off a handful of sorrel and chewed it as he rode along, he blew a few notes on his flute, and so they came to the Hofke van Ringen. This was an old Flemish castle built in red brick with bands of white, with a sloping slate roof and slender turret made steep to throw off the rain easily. It was surrounded by a wide green moat with water lilies and rushes in it, and beyond was a garden with tall trees all alive with birds. There it stood as if it had grown out of the ground, like a flower that had blossomed out of the beauty, the fierce vigor, and the elemental virtues of the Flemish race.

Pallieter stepped off the goat, which rushed away,

capering through the meadows, nibbling at the tenderest grass and leaves, and drinking out of the clear brooks. Pallieter lay down on the bank to watch the lusty exuberance of the spring. After that he went picking daisies and buttercups to please Charlot. When he had gathered an armful he shouted to the dog, and Lucifer and began to run as hard as he could. That started a wild game. Loeba rushed on ahead, the goat skipped beside him, and the puppies came shuffling along behind. They jumped over ditches and every now and then one of the puppies plumped in to the middle of the water. They ran and tumbled and rolled along all the way back to the Reinaert.



Then, mounted backward on Lucifer, his arm full of flowers, his face all smiles, Pallieter rode into the sweet smelling garden.

"Oh!" cried out Charlot as he gave her the flowers. "I must set these before Our Lady! I'll put them into vases just now." And for the moment she put the enormous bunch into a brass milk pail; there they made a perfect picture, ready to paint.

"But listen here," she said, her voice full of importance. "Father Nollekens has been here to say that we must bake two more cakes; he has three cousins coming to

visit him, barefoot friars from Dendermonde; two won't be enough for them."

"Yes," said Pallieter, "the fasting is over and by the time it begins again they'll be as fat as snails, full to the brim. O holy St. Francis, whose ribs stuck out with hunger!"

Charlot mumbled something to herself, and Pallieter went off to grind corn in his mill. It stood next to the garden on a little steep mound so as to catch the wind on all sides.

Tybaert came with tail erect, rubbing against his legs, and jumped at once on to the floury woodwork to look for mice.

The sack of corn was nearly empty; he shook out what there was into the hopper. He could fetch more presently. He fixed the stay of the mill against the wind, the sails began to turn, the stones revolved and ground the corn to flour. He put his head through the loophole and looked down over the land. He lighted his pipe, and the blue smoke waved like a feather in the clear air, while the mill cracked and creaked in the wind; verily, you could see the things with your own eyes growing in the new warmth of the sun. The green shoots pushed forth as if trying to make up for lost time.

When Pallieter looked on all this and the fine show there was for fruit and the good things of the earth, he said to himself,

"Who would ever want to die?" And he chanted out:

"Cold winter has left us,
The sweet spring is here;
On tree and on meadow
Her blossoms appear.
And thro' the green valley
With Molly I rove;
A nightingale warbles
Sweet hymns to my love."

Just as he was on to the second verse, Charlot called out excitedly:

"Brother, Father Nollekens is waiting for you; he hasn't much time, he says."

"Tell him to come up to the mill."

"What! Do ye think the father with his best cassock on 'll come and make it dirty in your mill?"

"Better a sack of flour on a black coat than a speck of sin on a soul."

But there came the priest of the convent—a short oldish man with a good-natured face and a cone-shaped head fringed with white hair He offered his snuff box.

"What d'ye think of the sun, Pallieter?"

"That it's the cream of life."

"It makes my throat dry."

"A man can always find a reason to give himself a treat. Come, let's have a glass."

They went into the sunny sitting room, where Pallieter fetched a gallon of beer and a cobwebbed bottle of wine. The priest drank the red wine and Pallieter the golden beer; the sun flickered over the table and dropped little warm beads of light into the brown and red liquid.

"Pallieter," said the priest, "Charlot will have told ou about the two cakes?"

"If she lay a-dying she would come to life again to ll me. You people know how to turn the women round our finger. Wish I could do it."

"Nothing easier! Be a priest, too."

Pallieter winked and said jokingly:

"They might like me better as I am!"

So saying, he poured out another glass, first holding it p to the sun, then pitching it down his throat till he asped for breath, and said:

"Here is the spirit of the earth; let it pass into my ody." And he drank another pint.

"Look, look at the glorious earth!" cried Pallieter, ointing to the sloping fields. "I could kiss you for ure joy. Come! let's have a dance!" He seized the riest's hands and pulled him round, singing:

"To-day it is St. Margaret's feast;
Let us be merry, come let us be gay.
To-day it is St. Margaret's feast;
Those who won't keep it had best stay away."

"There, there, that 'll do," said the priest, laughing, I've no time for that. I must read my breviary."

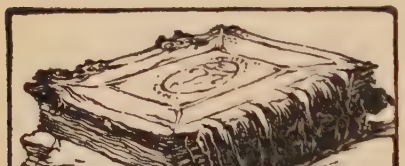
Pallieter let him go and called out:

"I'll send you some ripe strawberries."

"That's right! the very thing I dreamed of last night!" nd away went the old priest back to the convent. He pened his breviary and began to read. Splashes of unlight flickered through the tall trees on to his black

coat and his shining headpiece, and a spark now and then caught the gilt edge of the prayer book.

As Pallieter looked at all this he was moved to sing the praises of the blessed weather.



He opened the old Bible, took it up to the window, and read out aloud:

"Blessed is the man whom thou choosest and causest to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts. We shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house even of thy holy temple. . . . Thou visitest the earth and waterest it, thou greatly enrichest it with the river of God which is full of water, thou preparest them corn when thou hast so provided for it.

"Thou waterest the ridges thereof abundantly, thou settlest the furrows thereof; thou makest it soft with showers thou blessest the springing thereof,

"Thou crownest the year with thy goodness; and thy paths drop fatness.

"They drop upon the pastures of the wilderness; and the little hills rejoice on every side.

"The pastures are clothed with flocks;

"The valleys also are covered over with corn; they shout for joy, they also sing. . . .

"O God who coverest thyself with light as with a garment, who stretchest out the heavens like a curtain,

"Who layeth the beams of his chambers in the waters

who maketh the clouds his chariot, who walketh upon the wings of the wind. . . .

"He sendeth the springs into the valleys which run among the hills.

"They give drink to every beast of the field;

"The wild asses quench their thirst.

"By them shall the fowls of the heaven have their habitation which sing among the branches.

"He watereth the hills from his chambers;

"The earth is satisfied with the fruit of thy works.

"He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man that he may bring forth food out of the earth;

"And wine that maketh glad the heart of man and oil to make his face to shine. . . .

"The trees of the Lord are full of sap, the cedars of Lebanon which he hath planted;

"Where the birds make their nests, as for the stork the fir trees are her house;

"The high hills are a refuge for the wild goats, and the rocks for the conies.

"I will praise the Lord, I will sing praises unto him all the days of my life."

Pallieter closed the book.

While reading he had noticed the smell of honey, so he ate some spread on a brown biscuit.

What magnificent weather! Over there two children were plucking flowers in the meadow where the horses grazed; two nuns were walking side by side along the Nethe dyke, reading their paternoster aloud in turns,

and the three old blind men who lived in the convent poorhouse sat side by side on the grass, laughing.

Pigeons were flying round, a water-wagtail flew past, and Pallieter's heart overflowed with happiness. It melted like wax, and he murmured in the words of the blessed Mary:

"My soul doth magnify the Lord."

He lighted a candle before her image and said:

"If it's you that gives us the fine weather, then you deserve it."

Then he went on with his grinding till Charlot called him in to dinner.

First she served up chervil soup with asparagus; they each had two plates of it. Then came a joint of roast pork with spinach and potatoes like fine flour, fresh and tasteless. They took mustard with this to rouse a good thirst. Then they each ate about half a dozen little pancakes that smelled of eggs and cinnamon; they put butter and syrup and sugar on top. For a taste of something fresh they ate up a dish of strawberries till the juice ran off their chins. Their faces sweated with the good feeding, and Pallieter said:

"O Lord, the pleasure is now ended. Give it us another time."

CHAPTER TWO

AN EVENING IN MAY

HEN Pallieter had eaten his midday meal—coffee, bread and butter, with fresh rhubarb—he went into the garden to prepare a piece of ground for planting vegetables—scorzonera, purslane, and cauliflower. He filled a dung cart from the cesspool of the closet and wheeled it to the place where he had turned over the soil; there he spread it on the ground with wide sweeps till the air was redolent with the odor of manure.

Charlot shut the door.

"Yer nose is spoiled wi' the smell of incense and candle grease!" Pallieter called out to her.

When the ground was well saturated, he rubbed his hands with satisfaction and said:

"So I am made to be o' some use: what nature gives me I give back to her. Summat for summat, naught or naught."

He washed his hands and sat down at the door to smoke a pipe and watch the many children that were playing about. Some little urchins came begging for a story.

So Pallieter told about the seven dwarfs and the princess that was imprisoned in the well. They listened with open mouths and a lot more children came, pushing themselves in front of the others. And when it came to the pig with the long snout, they all shouted at once:

"Tell us another! Tell us another! Tell us about the 'Watersprite,' 'the fool that traveled to Rome,' 'the silver crucifix,' 'the weathercock,' "—and a great many more fairy-tales.

"No, no, my boys! Some other time!"

When he was going to get up they laid hold of his legs and held on to his coat.

"Here ye are," he said and threw some cents into the midst of them; in a flash the children were in a heap on the ground, pushing and scrambling after the money.

Pallieter chuckled and went off to get his boat out for a row.

He rowed against the stream till he was past the van Ringen farm and all of a sweat.

Then he let himself drift back, lighted his pipe, and sucked in the gentle beauty of the evening that was spreading wide over the earth.

The light of the sinking sun flowed over like molten gold, it ran out of the sky, drifted over the fields, dripped

rom the trees, and laid lumps of gold on the tree trunks; he white cows and the white walls of the houses and neir windows sparkled with it.

The water was liquid gold, there was not a cloud in he sky. Bats quivered black against the darkening lue heavens in which two little stars were shining; auzy mists crept along the surface of the water, over he flowers and rushes at its edge, and spread out over he fragrant meadows.

The yellow moon floated into the devout stillness of he evening, and far away he heard the clear strokes of he convent bell.

Pallieter's heart welled over with emotion; it was all oo beautiful for silence; he must speak and he felt for vords to express the profound peace and the magic of he evening; he repeated:

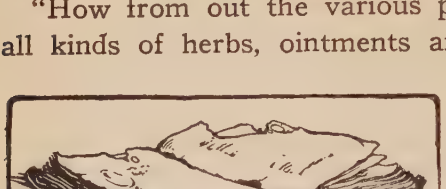
"The Angelus! From yonder cloud
God's angel calls us clear and loud.
Ave Maria!
The Angelus! Th' incarnate Word
By humble folk it shall be heard.
Ave Maria!"

And he let himself drift on through the mist and magic cents of the evening.

As he reached the landing place, he stood up in the oat for a moment, listening to the sound of a shepherd's orn in the far distance and the tears came into his yes.

Later on, Pallieter was reading by the light of a porcelain lamp, in an old parchment book:

"How from out the various plants and flowers and all kinds of herbs, ointments and plasters and many oils can be compounded for the easing and healing of wounds, cuts, burns and bruises for all parts of man's body."



Thus he knew what plants he must now gather and make ready for the use of the farmers, the nuns, and the poor people about him.

From time to time he looked up at the moon through the window. At half past ten he closed the window, blew the lamp out, and went upstairs to bed; he could hear Charlot in her room muttering her prayers.

He stood in his nightshirt, ready to step into bed, and went up to the window to look out again into the night all full of mist and moonlight. The atmosphere was soft and clear as oil.

"'Tis a sin to think of sleep," said Pallieter, and he leaned over the window sill, gazing into the wonderful night; the air was heavy with the scent of hawthorn and the young nightingale began to sing again. Pallieter listened intently. First came long, steady, fine-drawn notes; then clearer, broader sounds like the flow of deep water, and all at once the swelling tones broke up into sweet bubbles of harmony. And the silence of the night

hat was heard between the cadences became part of he delicious music.

Pallieter was thrilled through and through and paused o find expression for his intense delight. He looked for his concertina, sat down on a chair before the window, and there in his chilly nightshirt he played a mighty song full of sonorous chords of high tones and swaying middle tones, which rolled into a march out through the perfumed night and away over the moonlit meadows.

And then he was ready to jump into bed and go to sleep.

CHAPTER THREE

THE GARDEN AND CHARLOT'S LETTER

LL the new bright-green leaves which Spring, the enchantress, had bewitched out of the trees were now spread open against the sky.

The meadows were massed with flowers and the scent of gillyflowers, iris, and parsley permeated the air all day and night with the faint sweetness of an opiate. Who would have thought in the white winter that within the hard bare earth and black naked trees such a force of vivid life was hoarded?

Pallieter was weeding the young plants in the garden; the ground was soft as butter, rich and shining. Pallieter felt the sun like a warm breath on his shirt; he turned his back to enjoy it and began to sing. He stopped now and then to watch the sweet-smelling luxuriance around him; he had need of more than one pair of eyes to get sight of all the beauty that was there.

The trees were spread out in full leaf and their branches caught a green light like moonlight; roses and many other flowers were in bloom already.

A dewdrop sparkled on a purple-velvet pansy. In the

green lighted trees a blackbird fluted, hidden safely among the leaves and blossoms of a chestnut. He was pouring out his whole heart in clear song. It was like music in a church; there was devotion in it.

"Ay, that's worth a drink," muttered Pallieter. He put his hands to his mouth and called out: "Priest's wine! Give here the priest's wine!" And he ate up a handful of peas.

A bit later Charlot came out with a fat-bellied half-liter [1] bottle and old-fashioned glasses; he took a smell at the just opened wine, his mouth went open and his eyes closed as he poured it out, a flash of sunlight darted through the glass and deepened the pale liquid to gold.

When he had slowly sipped his glass empty he tapped against it with his thumb nail and a clear musical note vibrated from it.

Charlot poured out for herself, and then Pallieter noticed the smears of ink on her red face.

"Whatever makes yer face so black?"

"Well, I'm writin' a letter for 'em to come to the kermis. But I'm a-thinking," she added, quickly, "as I'd like to ask my godchild Marieke as well. How'd that be?"

"If she's a good hand at eating," said Pallieter, "why, let her come; then I can have a look at her."

"'Tis such a nice-looking gel," said Charlot, admiringly, "and good as an angel; she couldn't hurt a fly, let alone a fellow-creature. At her first communion . . ."

"Come, come! Haven't I heard that a hundred times?"

[1] Half-liter = 1 pint.

said Pallieter. "Tell her to come, with an empty belly and an appetite big enough to fill it."

"I'll tell 'em!" said Charlot, and she went off.

Pallieter drank up the rest of the wine. He meant to get to work again, but a flash of light caught his eyes. He looked up and saw a boat with a huge white sail that took up all the sky; the sun blazed on it and the breeze flapped it. Pallieter got up and leaned over the hedge to see it better.

The spicy scent of the hawthorn bushes made him forget the boat; but the boy who held the rudder suddenly blew his horn; the notes floated away over the fields and dropped apart after a pause, in the blue distance.

The sail moved on, and there before him stretched out the wide and pleasant Netheland. There it lay bright green, fair and clear in the mild light of the great sky. The heavens were virgin blue and low down there floated big puffed-out clouds, white as snow on the top. The Nethe's blue was deeper and smooth as clear oil.

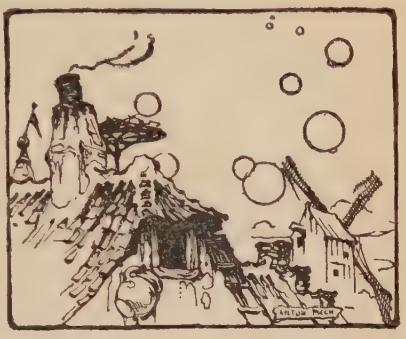
The windmills were turning slowly, the houses were bright red and white spots in the distance.

The innumerable buttercups, white stichworts, and yellow dandelions lay on the meadows like splashes of butter and milk. A triangle of wild geese flew past in the air, and in the purple shade of the wood a magpie chattered.

"Ah," said Pallieter, "there's naught wanted to set it off but a balloon!

And the foolish fellow fetched a basin, made a lather

with soft soap and rain water, went to look for the best pipe, and sat down again by the hedge. He blew vigorously into the water till a heap of bubbles came up into the midst of the soap. He caught one of the fragile globes in his pipe and blew carefully until a silvery bubble rose up, and as it grew larger and larger, red, green, purple, and gold streaks shifted about on it. Palieter was charmed; it reflected his own face, his house, and all the landscape.



"As if I'd blown my soul into it!" he sighed. When it was as large as an infant's head and heavy with color, he jerked it gently out of the pipe and it rose slowly into the blue air.

"What a fine thing! Pity I can't hang it up on the ceiling."

He made more and more, large and small, and they all sailed slowly up into the air, as if proud of their existence. They showed gold or red or green against the blue sky, and hung there swaying, lovelier than the stars of night. Some floated high up, some drifted down to the ground or broke against a tree stem, but most of them were shattered by the sunlight.

Peter, the stork, perched on the roof with his beak among his feathers, was a pensive observer of the game.

Pallieter saw him and tried to guide the bubbles his way. They came alongside him, but the bird let them pass, till one came too near and he snapped it to bits with his red beak.

"Well done, Peter!" shouted Pallieter, "you'll get a bit o' meat just now!" And he went on blowing as if he couldn't get enough of the heavenly colors.

While he was so busy at this, a man went by, a thin and yellow-faced creature, reading a big book. He was a philosopher, a theologian, a historian, a naturalist, and many other things.

"Hi!" called out Pallieter, who knew him. "How can you go about looking for last year's offal when the sun shines up there so brightly?"

"I've nothing to do with the sun," said the bookworm. "It's always shining. I am looking for a system of the universe."

"You want to keep water in a bird cage," said Pallieter. The philosopher walked on with his book, much offended.

Then there was a rustling and moving under the cabbage leaves and out crept a yellow-and-black tortoise.

"Hello, Fille!" said Pallieter. "I haven't seen you for two days. How are you? Come here!"

The tortoise came. Pallieter tapped with his knuckle on her polished shell. She looked up at him. He lifted her up and she began to rub her hard, rough head against his cheeks.

"You good dumb creature!" said Pallieter, putting her down again. "Here, that's for you!" and he caught one of the hundred flies that hung buzzing in the air and put it into her mouth.

Just then the clock in the convent tower struck twelve silvery strokes and Charlot came out of the kitchen, crying, joyfully:

"'Tis finished! It's done! I'll read it yer." She sat down in front of Pallieter, who listened where he was, crouched on the ground. A streak of sunlight settled on her red bodice and blue apron, another flickered over her left eye, which she screwed up, and there was a smear of ink from her nose to her lower lip—and so she read out her letter:

"Dear Uncle Harry

"I take up my pen hoping you are well as this leaves me at present. A week next Sunday is the kermis and our Mr. Pallieter would like to see you all come to the fair like last year to eat and drink and be merry as he says in the Bible; and he says that you must send word to all the family so as I don't have to write any more letters. Come by train at the same time you did last year. Master 'll be at the station to load up the wimmin, the menfolk must walk it. The blacksmith of t'other side will kill a sucking pig to roast, because as you know master don't kill any beast, not even a worm. He says he can't get himself to do it, but he

eats 'em all the same. He won't have no beast in the house though I'd rare like to have a canary bird, he won't hear of it nohow. He says they must fly—I've got a fine cage that I paid 4 francs for and he says I'd better put a tin canary in it. The peas and young potatoes 'll be in plenty by then and strawberries too. The priest's cook at the Convent has a new device for making apple tart ye shall have one—You can make sure of plenty of vittles—and summat else; master says ye must bring my godchild Marieke along wi' you or he'll know the reason why. In conclusion there's no more to tell. Remember me to Marieke and tell her to do a prayer for me.

"Hoping to see you all in good health and
I remain
Yours
obliged
Charlot Bellekens.

"P. C. When it gets dark he'll light up some lanterns and do a bit o' fireworks.
"Charlot Bellekens."

As the reading finished, two great tears were running down Charlot's red cheeks and she said, with a choke in her voice, "Come and 'ave yer dinner!"

CHAPTER FOUR

A VISIT TO THE BIRDS

HEN dinner was over Pallieter put on his climbing-irons, took a small ladder on his shoulder, and set out to look at the birds' nests with their eggs and young. He climbed nearly every tree, putting the ladder against the trunks so as to be able to look into the hollows, or clambered like a cat into the tree tops.

He saw the pinkish-green or black-speckled eggs glimmering in the shadowy nests, and took pleasure in counting and touching them softly with his fingers; but most of all he lingered over those with little shrinking young ones squeaking hungrily with wide-open beaks.

The fields lay peacefully in the sunshine; there were hardly any laborers to be seen. But the sun overhead in the clear heavens was busy at work; his rays warmed and penetrated the moist green earth. The carrots swelled in the ground, and you could almost see the blue-green blades of wheat shooting up.

The distance looked pale and clear like the sky in old Gothic paintings. Pallieter went up tree after tree; he stopped to chat with a farmer or one of the peasant

girls, or sat and looked at the fields; he quenched his thirst at the brooks, and had gone a good step altogether when his stomach began to cry out with hunger.

He turned to go home, when suddenly he saw a great, tall poplar that stood all alone on a slope in an open field, and behind it hung an immense white Flemish cloud. He must climb that first—and in less than no time he was up in the top of it.

Ye gods! what a paradise the earth looked from up there! Nature's very heart lay open at his feet. For miles round the fertile land stretched away beneath him. He could see about twenty church spires, and farms lay scattered on all sides. All the villages had windmills, the red roofs and white houses were dropped like beads of coral and pearl on the richly brocaded green of woods and sprouting corn and square fields.

Black railway trains were slipping slowly along, leaving a trail of white smoke; barges with spread sails glided on the Nethe that wound, a glistening chain, joining one edge of the horizon to the other.

The sky hung above it all, loftier seen from there than below, and the sun illumined the arch of space with its glory.

It all looked as fresh and bright as a new toy, and Pallieter said:

"Man ain't worth a plug o' baccy, seen from up here."

He perched up there high and dry like a giant who was lord of the land. To his great joy, a breeze came and rustled the sea of leaves. Pallieter swung in rhythm with it, as if he were sailing on a cloud to some far-off

and; almost unconsciously he lifted up his voice and rang mightily. It was so beautiful he could not go away, and now the white light mellowed into gold and the sun grew larger and larger and turned red; red flared into the clouds and suffused the whole atmosphere.

And the sun sank down behind the purple woods into a chaos of huge, blazing clouds, and the shadows lengthened and subdued the brightness. Below, the earth lay in twilight, but the sun gilded Pallieter like red tinsel, and he looked admiringly at himself.

Away in the distance he saw two herons hovering. He could hardly take his eyes off them, they appeared so wonderful in the oncoming darkness. He watched the noble curves they drew along the darkening sky. Sometimes they paused awhile on outspread wings, and then drifted straight on through the dark blue. They were mysterious, impressive, and just as noiselessly as they had appeared they swept out of sight in the purple dusk.

Though they had vanished, yet the beauty of their presence lingered in the sky. The triumph of the sun died out, only a faint golden spark flickered in the west, or fell on the empty fields.

It was evening.

Pallieter climbed down, and hurried home with a rumbling empty stomach, and he was silent, for his heart was thrilled to its very core.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE SATURDAY BEFORE THE FAIR

HE sun grew larger, and the sky took on a deeper blue.

The trees had put on double their size, and the river looked a foot higher with the height of the reeds and flags, the hemlock and cow parsley that had shot up along the water's edge. The grass in the fields came up to your knees and hundreds of weeds flourished among the flowers, sorrel, chicory, forget-me-nots, colt's-foot, and clover; there was no end of them.

And one day after another the aspect changed. Yellow was the predominant color, then purple, then a tinge of pink, then green again, varying with the growth of either weeds or flowers. It was a joy to the eye and a treat to the smell. The brooks were coated over with green, and the wheat grew above the farmers' heads.

The woods stood like mountains; and while the sun out of doors made ready for the banquet of the year, which is the fruit harvest, folks were busy inside and outside their houses with preparations for the kermis.

This year it fell at Whitsuntide and Pallieter's house was in a fine bustle.

Charlot's heart was big with expectation, for the great procession of the convent was going to take its way through the garden and over the ramparts, and she was to walk in it and so earn many indulgences for herself and other souls. Her face beamed with satisfaction.

Pallieter helped her to cut a whole clothes basket full of strewings. She had bought shiny paper in red, blue, yellow, and green, to be cut up into square bits, and she begged for silver paper off the chocolate in the Catholic shops. The day of the procession she would put in roses and elder blossoms and fragrant herbs. It could not be beautiful enough, for the Lord Himself was to tread it with His holy feet, and she sang hymns while she was cutting.

She would be able to boast and make a great show with her basket of strewings, for most of the nuns were poor and had to be content with the colored covers of the St. Francis and Mary magazines.

"Won't the Lord be glad wi' these fine strewings!" she said, rubbing her hands.

"Then it don't take much to please him!" said Pallieter. And that put Charlot out of temper for the next half hour.

Saturday came at last, and not a cloud in the sky; not even a breeze; everything was as still as still, not wind enough to wave a feather.

Charlot had her hands full. First she minced meat and made it up into large balls, and let them stew a bit while she made a sauce of currant juice thickened with flour. When they were ready, and then roasted to a nice brown, she poured the currant sauce over, and it made your mouth water to look at them. Meantime a great pan of rice had been cooking; this she turned out into great colored dishes, and scraped off with her fingers what had stuck to the pan.

While she sat shelling peas Pallieter skimmed the soup, and that was so good that you licked your fingers, for there was a game cock and more than two hundred mince balls, four pounds of marrow bones, and a large piece of beef in it. Then she rubbed the skin off the new potatoes, and he prepared the sucking pig ready for roasting; the other meat and viands that had to be cooked next day were kept fresh and cool in the cellar.

Then Charlot plucked the lettuce, cut the cauliflowers, hurried about looking after various things, and the quiet midday hours glided over the fertile earth rich with sunshine.

About four o'clock Pallieter opened the black door of the baking oven, and he looked as devout as if he were kneeling in church. Lord! what a warm sweet smell of flour and eggs and milk met his nose, and what delicious golden color gleamed within the dusky cavity. He drew

ut the loaves carefully and laughed with pleasure at ie richness, the deep brown color on top, golden and ellow at the sides. Crisp deep cracks revealed the hite heat of the bread within and Pallieter greedily cked off some bits at the side.

The tarts were well baked, appetizing enough to mpt St. Anthony, and the sun creeping through the indowpanes lighted up the red and yellow jam.

Then all at once the light faded and a great gray cloud oscured the sun. Pallieter could hardly believe it, and harlot rushed into the bakery, crying and lamenting!

"Oh, my! There's all the fine weather spoiled! And ie kermis, and the procession! . . . O Jesus, Mary, and oseph! I must be off and say a prayer!"

And off she went to her bedroom, and fell on her nees before the Scherpenhenvel Madonna murmuring rayers with her eyes shut.

But all the same the rain came pouring down.

"Well, then, let's make use of it!" cried Pallieter, and e left the tarts and went outside into the garden.

In less than no time he stood there dripping like a ater spaniel, and it did him good, like warm milk and urrant bread to a shivering beggar.

The cool, soft rain pattered on to the ground, washed ie trees and plants, spattered into the water, and attled on to the roof, a very water symphony!

The pigeons and fowls lifted their wings up to their eads just to wet the warm tips of their feathers.

Peter, the stork, and his mate both stood motionless

on one leg in their nest, and the ducks squatted on the bleaching-ground huddled together with open wings.

Pallieter had had his hair cut short two days before the rain dripped on to it so that it shone like a ball of granite.

It rained and rained! And while here it was streaming down, a sunbeam pierced through the cloud and lighted up a strip of vivid green over there in the fields. The light sifted through the rain so that it fell in gold, like golden peas. Pallieter saw all that and called out, "It's manna, like manna!" and he threw his head back and let the golden drops fall into his open mouth. Then another sunbeam appeared, and beyond that another just as if the first fresh spring had come back in a hurry.

Away there above the slope, the dripping end of the rain cloud lifted up, and half the land glittered in the sunlight, while the darker piece was still dropping rain.

The birds shook the wet off their wings and flew up to another branch, then a throstle began to twitter, a finch to chirp, and all at once the whole choir started: everything that had a beak began to whistle and t

varble out of pure joyfulness. The cocks crew and a ark soared up to heaven.

"Well, ye're daft," exclaimed Charlot, "to stand i' ne rain and get wet like a boggart!"

"Hold your tongue, girl; it's made me grow a foot aller," said Pallieter, and he went to put on a clean hirt and dry trousers.

Nature seemed forty days younger; all sorts of scents teamed up out of the damp earth and the trees were ejoicing. The sky was blue again as a forget-me-not, nd the sun made all the wet things sparkle.

Pallieter walked his garden, full of peace.

Lo! the one little quarter of an hour's rain had brought he whole wealth of summer with it. The rain had rought out all the fragrance of the roses, elder blossom, nd mignonette, all together. It had washed open the uds that were ready to burst, and all at once there ere twice as many flowers. The trees were still ripping, raindrops glittered silver on every blossom.

A feeling of beatitude came over Pallieter. He took is bagpipes, sat down on the bench before the door, nd began to play old bagpipe songs, such as "I'll sing song of long-forgotten folk, whose beards hung down o their knees." The harsh notes echoed away through he golden sunset.

The nuns came out to listen, chatted with Charlot, who proudly displayed her basket of strewings, and they trolled off along the rampart.

The supper and the beer in the scrubbed-up kitchen asted better than usual. Then came the night and the

stillness; the earth exhaled the rain into silvery mist, and almost as the last glimmer of daylight died away, the sun came back again, red as a furnace, and the world woke up to life again.

It was Sunday, Pentecost, Feast of the Holy Ghost.

CHAPTER SIX

KERMIS MORNING

HE mist was still hanging among the bushes and over the water when the bells of the churches began to ring.

When Pallieter saw what fine weather the day had brought, he threw his cap into the air and went up to the belfry in the attic with a smiling face. He threw open the wooden shutters and let in the white daylight, dazzling at first to his eyes, and then he looked on to the undulating breadth of fresh fields spread out beneath him. Then he began to knock on the wooden handles; the wires tinkled, the wood creaked and squeaked, but above rose the clang of the bells, clear as crystal, into the pearly atmosphere. The joy of the bells vibrated through his heart, and he sang with them lustily.

Out of the attic window he hung a new kermis flag, and the mild east wind rippled out its colors. As soon as he had had his breakfast of ham and eggs with Charlot, he strolled out of doors, smoking a good cigar. Yesterday's rain had been like a salve to the ground, and made everything brighter, fresher, and more beautiful.

Pallieter had been walked off his legs with all the preparations for the kermis; now he was as glad as a child to smell the quick scent of the fields. He laughed till it re-echoed, drank some beer, and played at bowls.

When he came back he put the piebald horse into the covered cart and drove to the station.

All the houses in the town had hung out flags, and the belfry of St. Gommarus Church was playing national airs above the roofs where pigeons were strutting. The sellers of balloons were already about the streets, and not far off a barrel organ was grinding.

While Pallieter was away Charlot was all in a worry with her cooking. "Come what may," she said at last, "but the Lord's business first." And she nailed candle brackets on the front of the house with tall candles in, and next to the front door she set a table covered with a stiff white tablecloth, on which she placed the box with the image of the Virgin, a crucifix of boxwood, and all the relics from her own room.

"They'll all want to see our Lord," she said. And all round and among these she placed glass vases of flowers, and old brass candlesticks with candles with paper twisted round.

When she saw that all was in order she went back to the cooking.

There in the peacefulness the birds sang, the flag uttered, and the sun streamed through the leaves of ne trees; it shone on the roses and the brasswork, and nade the gold-brocaded mantle of the Holy Mother litter.

Pallieter loaded up the women into the cart, and when e saw Marieke his eyes grew big with surprise, and e said with a sigh:

"Oh, what a fine gel!"

The men came behind on foot.

Inside, the cart was like a bunch of bright-colored owers. The women all wore their heavy gold ornaments nd the older ones had on their fine lace caps, and ver them a straw hat tied down with a bright-colored ibbon.

They wore silk patterned shawls; some were deep ed, purple, or creamy-white ground, with crimson owers on it. One woman had a suckling child with er.

A quarter of an hour later they reached the Reinaert nd were all agog, chattering and shaking hands with harlot. Then all at once Marieke stood before her in blue dress with white spots, fresh and sweet as a wild ower.

"Oh, what a pretty maid you've grown!" she cried, Oh, Marieke, my dear!" And she kissed her again, and er tears splashed on to Marieke's face.

The men came up, ten of them, and Pallieter welcomed hem all indoors, where they began at once to drink

beer, and to light their pipes, and to talk about their land, their cattle, their children, and the weather. Other things were as strange to them as what is written in a book. They didn't know or care about other things, ye

Pallieter always said, "A farmer with his wit about him is the right sort of man!" Afterward they all went into the garden to wait for the procession. They drifted into groups, and the silk kerchiefs mixed prettily with the bright green growing things. Some stayed to look at the fountain spouting it highest and dripping down on the backs of the quiet goldfish; others looked at the game fowl and all sorts of poultry and everyone was amazed at the magnificent tail of the peacock.

The pipes glowed, the gilt images glittered, and all around lay the world basking in the sun.

All at once some reed-like notes of music sounded through the garden. It was Pallieter, who came along

with Marieke, playing the oboe. When they came to the fountain Marieke held the palm of her hand open to catch the water drops, and Pallieter took the instrument from his mouth and said to her:

"Now let me have a good look at ye!"

He dropped his hands on to her shoulders and looked at her from head to foot. In her rosy-cheeked face shone two large brown eyes with little black points in them, her lips, apple red, curved just under the well-shaped nose, and a dimple darted into her right cheek as she laughed. The chin curved prettily above the milk-white dainty throat, her young bosom was firm, and her hips well formed. Her hair was dark brown, and she had soft, pretty little hands. She was pretty! Her whole being breathed the breath of Mother Nature and the gay growth of young things. There she stood, as natural as water, and her face was an open book. The sun shone through the tips of her ears and made them rosy, it lighted a halo in her hair, and Pallieter exclaimed:

"Ye need naught but wings!"

She laughed, and her white teeth gleamed, and she looked down at her shoes.

Pallieter continued to look at her and his heart swelled with longing, but she looked up again and said:

"Play another tune."

So he began to play again and they walked away together.

Just then the ringing of many bells filled the air. Pallieter cried out: "It's here! It's coming! Come on, folks!"

And everyone hurried to be standing at the door.

As they all moved round behind the decorated tables Pallieter lighted the candles and strewed the sandy road with flowers and paper snippets.

From behind the quaint gables of the houses came the triumphal beat of drums, a flourish, and then a slow, triumphal march on a brass band.

"There 'tis!" cried the children and the townspeople who had come to look. They crowded on to the grass between the high tree trunks, so as to leave the sandy road free. The peasant women took their paternosters out of their pockets and began to recite prayers.

And there came the procession through the wide gateway on to the shady convent courtyard.

It was the tall sexton, Samdieke, who headed the procession, in his red cassock and white surplice. The light shone on his smooth cranium with a thin lock of black hair combed over it. He carried a tall thin crucifix, and his eyes were bent on the ground.

On each side of him walked a little choir boy carrying a heavy silver candlestick, with a lighted candle. The orphans of the Marolle followed in three long rows; they were dressed neatly in black, above which their faces looked pale, with their prim, straight-cut black cape, and thin from sitting indoors. There were little tots not five years old among them, who kept their eyes on the ground as piously as the elder ones. There were many children of drunken fathers among them. Behind them walked the severe-looking nuns in wide black cloaks, and white caps with broad wings to them. They were all

thin and straight; only the Mother Superior was a short, plump figure.

Then came a stout farmer in a red cassock, carrying the blue velvet banner of St. Begga. Then a dazzling company of young girls, little children all in starched white frocks, with small flags and gilt cornucopias filled with flowers, ears of corn, and sweet herbs.

Their faces shone with excitement, and they stepped along proudly with their straight young legs in time with the music, and their white skirts rustled about them like a sea.

The musicians were old men; they blew with all their might, and their clothes smelled a bit musty.

Next followed four novices, in their white dresses, with sleeves that were too long. Together they carried on a tray, that rested with leather-covered supports on their shoulders, a blue-painted Madonna. It had been washed ashore in the time of the Spaniards and was now treated with honor, all the country round, for many long years. This was the "Honeysweet Virgin from Holland, washed ashore here by the waves and brought to our country."

Then came all the women members of the congregation, old and young, all reciting rapidly in undertones the response, "Ore pro nobis," to the harsh litany voice of a stalwart nun. They all had their prayer books in

their hands, and the blue ribbon with the medal round their necks.

Charlot was among these, and she took up room enough for three, but she did not even raise her eyes to look at Pallieter and Marieke and her relations.

Little boys dressed in red and purple coats followed with staves and lanterns.

Twelve nuns in white sheets were weighed down with the heavy silver reliquary of St. Begga. Its golden rays shone like the sun.

And then, all dressed in white linen from head to foot, there followed the orphans of St. Begga in long rows of five. They looked like ghosts; they sang hymns in Latin, in their shrill, hungry young voices.

Then a rustling movement of variegated silk and velvet banners, clatter of silver and brass, the flashing of high-held lighted lanterns and torches. Among these,

with tall, shabby, white silk hats and clean neckties, walked all the old almsmen from the convent, each with a smoking torch of an arm's thickness. The three blind men were there, too.

After this, amid a dazzling glitter of sun-lighted gold, surrounded by chanting and bell-ringing and sweet smell of incense, came the Monstrance.

All the onlookers fell on their knees and folded their hands.

Four men in red held the canopy beneath which the priest in his gold chasuble held up before his face the shining Monstrance with the Holy Wafer.

His eyes were closed, his shiny bald head obtruded a little above the high stiff cap, and his long white hair waved round his ears.

Visitors from other towns who had joined the procession followed behind.

Slowly the procession wound its way under the luxuriant trees of the ramparts. The sun shone on it all till the colors glittered. The breeze flapped the flags and swayed the dresses. The band played, the bells tinkled, the church bells clanged out the great festival through the air.

Pallieter was so moved by all the simple show under which so great a faith lay hidden, so touched, that a lump rose in his throat.

"Come!" he said. "Let's all follow."

And the peasants, with Marieke, joined the procession, and Pallieter was last with a lighted candle in his hand.

The Monstrance went on glittering in the distance through the trees. Two nightingales began to call to each another and the incense still hung blue and fragrant under the boughs; an odor of sanctity hovered over the earth.

There was not a soul to be seen in the quiet Sabbath fields.

The procession was over. Pallieter was walking about the ramparts with the visitors and Charlot was busy cooking indoors. Suddenly from the convent garden came the chatter and shouting of children, and out of the gateway streamed a crowd of the white-muslin girls and the purple-vested boys, dancing and jumping, carrying a parcel of sweets. They trooped all together into the field, calling and laughing with joy, and sucking sweets. There were about forty of them, all rustling and flashing with color. They jumped over the brooks, chased one another about, and gathered armfuls of flowers and rushes.

Then three nuns came out to scold them and send them off home, but the children laughed at them and made a ring round them, dancing and singing.

The nuns joined in directly, and seemed to enjoy the fun, and then all the novices who were walking on the ramparts came down and joined in the fun. The priest

appeared and beckoned to them with his finger. Pallieter went and stood behind him, and waved his arm to the nuns to come and fetch the priest. They understood at once, and led him into the crowd of merrymakers, whether he would or not. They made a ring and danced round him, singing:

"Is the priest at home to-night?
I'd like to get my sins put right
Before the day is dawning!"

And the priest sang the answer with a shaky voice, beating time with his forefinger:

"They say I'm poor as Job himself;
I've neither cent nor gear nor pelf."

When Pallieter saw and heard this he caught hold of Marieke's hand and pulled her into the crowd, and they whirled round with the rest. They sang and twirled, and feet stamped and skirts swung, and the priest held his sides with laughing. Pallieter started another song, threw his legs up as high as his head, and would not hear of stopping.

On the convent rampart, the country folks, the older nuns, and the men from the almshouse all stood laughing and chuckling, and Charlot at the kitchen window laughed till the tears ran down her face.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE PARTY

HILE they all walked about the garden, waiting for the priest, Pallieter, Charlot, and Marieke fixed up a long table on trestles under the shade of the chestnut tree; they spread on it a blue-and-white-check tablecloth and laid out brightly flowered plates, shining glasses, knives, forks, and spoons. A row of dusty bottles of wine were placed down the middle of the table (they looked like a procession of nuns), and stowed away in the shade there were two large casks of beer.

In about a quarter of an hour the priest arrived; he brought a long clay pipe with him. They all took their seats round the table and the shade threw a bluish tinge over the bright-colored rustling dresses.

They talked a bit as they waited for the dinner, and some of them impatiently laid hold of their spoons; their thoughts ran into the kitchen while their eyes roamed over the fields and meadows lying deserted in the sunshine.

At last Charlot appeared with an enormous soup tureen. She served it out, looking for plenty of mince-

balls for each plate, while her tongue never stopped clattering. Then the priest crossed himself and bent in silence, the others all doing the same. Charlot stood with eyes closed and her fat hands folded on her massive person.

It made a moment of impressive silence, broken by the shrill crow of a young cockerel in the farmyard.

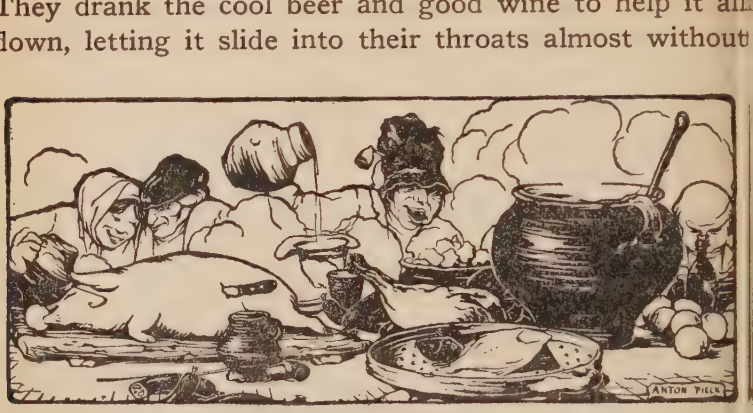
Then the clatter of spoons began and the slobbering of the many mouths. As soon as the soup was finished, pipes were lighted and Pallieter stood up and said: "Cousins and nieces of Charlot, ye mun all eat a mighty lot, as we've made a great cooking and it mun all be finished, and so I say that the four as eats the least mun draw lots, and the one as draws blank shall be made to sit on his plate o' rice puddin'."

All laughed and applauded at this and the feast began; it was a feast of the gods.

No one wanted to find himself the laughingstock of the party, so they set to work, women as well as men, to eat as much as ever they could.

And there was plenty, to be sure: turbot and potatoes, ham with beans, roast veal and asparagus, chicken and salad, a whole sucking pig with spectacles on and an orange in its mouth, yards of sausage with cabbage.

They ate and ate and filled their plates again till the sweat ran off their faces and dripped on to the food. They drank the cool beer and good wine to help it all down, letting it slide into their throats almost without



swallowing. What a noise and bustle there was, and how they roared with laughter when anyone paused in his eating; they hailed him to be throned upon the rice pudding.

Sun and shade made a picture of the scene; their red faces, the stiff blouses of the men and the women's silk kerchiefs, and just over the hedge flowed the glistening river and the quiet Sabbath fields lay peacefully in the sunshine. Their merriment lingered among the leaves and the good scent of food drifted over the meadows.

Pallieter, who had secured his place next to Marieke, was chuckling to himself as he watched them filling themselves.

Charles Verlinden, a fat butter merchant, let the cutlets with peas and carrots go past. "I'll make up for

t presently," he said. They all began to jeer him as the ne who would have to sit in his pudding.

Their stomachs were swollen with food and still fresh lishes were being brought in. One young farmer urned suddenly pale and ushed behind a tree, choking, vomited, and ame back saying, " 'Tis naught." He emptied his wineglass and lighted a igar. Marieke kept giving large pieces of meat o Loebas, and the priest aid, "Drinking is as good is eating"; he felt protected by his cassock, so ie went on with the old ed wine.

Charlot was nearly done for, and said, with a gasp of epletion, "Looks as if I might be the one!" At this all hrieked with delight and began to sing, "Charlot has dropped off the bridge into the water!"

Now came a dish of veal cutlets with cauliflower. They were still able to make a good set at this and joked nd chaffed one another, they went on drinking, and he wine began to get into their heads. Then came he last dish but one, pigeons with black cherry compôte; Stans fed her infant with the juice from her finger till ts face was all crimson. A farm servant brought a econd dish of this, but the child knocked it over with its

fists and it fell on the ground in pieces and scattered thr pigeons. Most of the company were glad of this, foc very few of them had any appetite left. Stans gave hes child a good shaking for this and it began to scream lustily, whereupon she opened her bodice and pushe her thick breast into its cherry-stained mouth; the infan pressed its little fists on to it and started suckin directly.

By this time they had dropped all decorum. Pallieter aware of Marieke so near him, put his arms round hes and kissed her with cherry-stained lips, leaving a ros spot on her cheek. All the men began to kiss the women and there were laughing and pushing, all sorts of noise and above all the child's screaming.

Stans forgot the breast hanging out of her bodice as her fat body shook and wobbled with laughter. Glasses were broken and bottles rolled off the table.

The sun was sinking.

At last came two servants carrying great dishes of rice pudding on a tray. Everything depended on thi dish and they all braced themselves for the attempt.

There were only Pallieter and a thin, bony woman who were able to finish their plates. It fell to Marieke the priest, Charles Verlinden, and Charlot to draw lots Everyone was excited and stood close round Pallietes without speaking, and a loud hurrah rang out when th fat butter merchant drew the blank. The fat man trie to run away.

"Catch 'im!" shouted Pallieter. "Charlot, bring th dish!"

The farmers held Charles fast, while he wriggled like a pig to get loose. Charlot advanced with the enormous fish, but she shook so helplessly with laughter that the fish fell and broke to pieces. Charles Verlinden danced and clapped his hands with joy. They all laughed it to split their sides and Pallieter rolled on the ground, roaring.

Tired and exhausted, they all sat down to rest on the grass by the river bank, while the earth was sinking into the sun's golden arms.

Then in the bright moonlight, when they had eaten and drunken under the low-hanging branches of the apple and medlar trees, when they had laughed and danced and finished up with the fireworks crackling along the ground to make them jump, with no end of noise and bustle and handshakes they took leave of Charlot and went off singing, Pallieter, with Marieke on his arm, playing the concertina along the rampart and through the streets to the station.

There he took leave of all the women with a loud smacking kiss, and when it came to Marieke he didn't know when to stop, and kept hold of her till she promised to come again soon for a few days.

They went away all warm and full of chatter in their best clothes, away to their far-off villages, to be up in the morning at daybreak and labor again with their old clothes on in the soil and manure of the tilled fields.

Pallieter seemed to miss something that had gone away with them. When he got home he found Charlot

in the kitchen asleep, with her head on the table, her cheeks fiery red, and her rosary and prayer book beside her. The garden still smelled of the exploded fireworks. The moon was shining on pieces of broken plates and bottles in the grass; it lighted up the spouting fountain and the disorder of the dinner table with the glasses and dishes of fruit. It looked like a picture to Pallieter; he sat down to have a good look at it.

Far off in the town there was still kermis music playing, but quite near him a nightingale was fluting; he could see it sitting quite clearly against the silver sphere of the moon. It was whistling short notes, and then listening to itself, and each note was a golden one. Pallieter sat there quite a time with the moonlight on his hands, and the quiet of the night filled his heart.

Then he went for a walk.

The Nethe was quite smooth; only now and then the moonlight showed one bright ripple on its dark surface. The fields were shrouded in mist and the grass lay heavy with dew.

The stillness was divine.

Pallieter strolled along, picked a dew-wet flower and held it between his teeth; his shadow strolled alongside of him.

He came to the orchard where the fruit hung motionless in the thin mist.

The corn glimmered pale; moonlighted ears of it were bent over the white flowers along the brook-sides and the birch trees quivered and rustled their delicate leaves.

He saw the white tail of a rabbit scuttle away among

the celery—and what was more, a pair of lovers sitting silently courting against a woodstack.

Pallieter stepped aside so as not to annoy them. After all the noise and stir and uproarious merriment of this kermis holiday, the night with its wonderful moonlight touched the very depths of his soul and his heart melted into a strange tenderness.

He thought of Marieke, the sweet, good Marieke who had the beauty of a wild flower, and he had put his arms round her and pressed kisses on her lips! He longed to have her with him, to be together quietly hand in hand like two children.

Something there was in him that he could not define, but he let it rest, it was so sweet to his soul, like a cool cherry in a warm mouth. And when he came to a little pool with the moon shining in it he took his mouth organ out of his pocket and sighed and sucked such fine silver notes from it they might have been the voice of the moonlight.

CHAPTER EIGHT

JOYS OF A SUMMER DAY

OME time had passed since the kermis... Ever since the sunrise and the first swallows began to circle in the morning air Pallieter had been standing by the mill with a long wagoner's whip, cracking and switching it till the air re-echoed.

He stood near the wooden piers of the old mill; the wide sails swept quickly in front of him, creaking loudly; between each revolution he could see the landscape of the Nethe swathed in a thick morning mist.

The sun, not bright yet, hung just above the gray roofs where the bells for early mass were ringing from churches and convents, the shrill whistle of early trains pierced the air. The sun was not high enough to light up the trees, but a good breeze was blowing up from behind the looming wood that made creases in the mist and the leaves began to rustle, and cows lowed in search of one another.

Pallieter thought of Marieke; she had been in his thoughts ever since the kermis Sunday and he said:

"O my sister and my bride, thou hast wounded me with thine eye! . . ."

He thought of her sweet face and tender young body, and the whip cracked and whistled harder. The sun rose higher, the thin clouds dispersed, and the deep blue spread out above the earth. The mists dropped and the windows of the houses flashed into red flame, the weather vane on a farmhouse glittered, and the sunshine spread out over the fields. The edges of the newly plowed furrows caught up the flashes like waves of the sea, insects chirped and buzzed. Pallieter cried, "Father Sun impregnates Earth, the mother!" and he rushed quickly between the revolving sails and down on to the dewy meadows. He went sauntering along the water side by hedge and pathways, cracking the world awake. The mists had vanished, the distance was clear, rich with cornfields and vegetable patches. Pallieter rejoiced in the azure sky adorned with tufts of cloud like cauliflowers; he snuffed up the mild smell of the sail. Away in some farmyard a donkey brayed like a rusty pump.

This month of May had overflowed with good things. Life had come back to the earth. Winter was forgotten and the warm and mighty summer was at the door.

The great work was over. The fruit hung simmering on the trees, birds had done with egg-laying and a magnificent peace brooded over nature as a warrior relaxes after fierce battle.

These were the best days of all for the sheep with

their lambs running beside them, and for grasshoppers and young fish.

Nature grudges no one her gifts, her bounties are for all without asking. She is simple as a child and kind as a mother, and what she gives is a lasting good to the soul. It is the universal benevolence of the old earth that ever renews itself, misunderstood by those who are seeking elsewhere.

For this reason the philosophers ever preached, "Go to nature! Follow nature!" while they themselves turned away from the sun and wore themselves to skeletons shut out of life among their piles of books.

"Philosophy is not found in books, but in living," said Pallieter, standing among the onion fields, watching the jeweled play of the sunbeams. So powerful the sun was that its rays darted like arrows through the denses foliage and made the leaves seem transparent.

Then something red caught Pallieter's eye through the silvery elm branches, something blood red.

He leaped the brook, crept through the grass, and there was a great field of poppies. They had soaked up all the sunlight into their fiery color till they looked like a pool of blood.

Tears welled into Pallieter's eyes and he exclaimed with a gasp of wonder:

"O St. John! why is this not in thy Apocalypse!"

The sight drew him so mightily that he walked suddenly into it, up to his chest in the tremendous redness.

The sun flamed and crackled through the great blossoms as if it were red glass, and threw up a red glow into the air, crimsoning Pallieter's face and his hands and his hair.

He wanted to touch and stroke the great red masses, and pushed his hands into the flowers and laid hold of a great bunch, waving it in the air and crying: "Color! Color is the all in all!"

He walked on and turned into the convent woods, woods that were like a green ocean with their never-ending song of birds and of wind and alive with all sorts of animal life. Truly a wood is like the sea!

He pushed through the thick-standing alder bushes and passed at once out of sunlight into depths of gorgeous green. The bushes of hazel, willow, elm and oak and thorns among them grew as close as hair on a dog's back, and everywhere ivy, thick as a wall, clung round the mossy tree trunks and twined with other creepers from one tree to another. It carpeted the ground and looked impenetrable, but Pallieter crept through crevices, jumped over branches, climbed up a fallen tree, let himself drop beyond it, and crept on under a curtain of ivy, and so pushed his way deeper into the wood, which teemed with the rich life of summer.

A hundred thousand birds made music; the sound fell like rain from the laden boughs and from the air, and on

the ground came the hum and buzzing of flies and insects.

In every splash of sunlight small lizards were lying like bronze ornaments; little sand-colored snail shells were fastened to the twigs and flower stems. Caterpillars, slugs, spiders, centipedes, moths were busy everywhere. There were frogs and toads and moles in and out of the earth, all mingling in the earthy smell. The quivering pools of bog water were alive with fishes, tadpoles, and worms.

Woods are the heart of the earth! It was all steeped in the good smell of moss and growing wood and the wild strawberries, the little crimson berries with their crude taste! Pallieter's lips were stained with them. He pushed on through all the lush growth till he came into the real forest.

Here he bowed his head and stood still, and felt himself very, very small. There were no bushes here, but out of the russet carpet of leaves on all sides towered up the smooth gray trunks of beech trees, shutting off the blue of heaven with their heavy canopy of leaves. Row after row behind each other they stretched into immeasurable depth of trees, closing in the distance into a screen of gray wood through which no sight of sky or land penetrated.

The light here was as pale as if the evening were drawing in, and quiet as if it were underwater.

For the sake of hearing something he put his hand to his mouth and shouted, "Pallieter!" His name rever-

berated as if sounded in a church, was echoed three times, and fell dead in the gray aisles of the wood.

Then he began to laugh so loud and long that the one echo broke against the other, and there was laughing on all sides of him. Peal after peal rolled out of Pallieter's mouth, while the echoes tripped over one another, till the whole wood was in a roar.

"Now the trees have spoken," said Pallieter, and he walked on, singing.

The wood was like a lofty chamber. He stopped to look at a squirrel that was climbing a tree and at some very large red-spotted toadstools near its roots.

There were rabbits all about; they skipped, frightened, into their burrows at the noise of Pallieter's voice. Then he caught sight of a fox trap; he stamped the spring loose and buried it in the ground, muttering:

"Because the fox eats up grass, must he be killed?"

He quenched his thirst at a little waterfall no wider than his hand, the source of a stream.

The scent of the woods hung about him, his coat and hands were green with moss, his laughter still echoed through the distance, and the silence of the woods lingered in the depth of his heart. The woods had laid their magic on him.

What a pity he had not brought his hunting-horn with him, so that he could pour out the very deepest depths of his soul!

"That'll do later on," he said as he turned into the moist fields, already bright with sunlight and spotted with brown and black and white cows. He walked through the drooping barley and his lively hunger made him look longingly at their rosy udders heavy with sweet, warm milk.

His mouth watered; they only had to be pulled and he could be satisfied. The longing made him drop his whip; he twisted a piece of paper into a bag, crept under one of the cows, squeezed an udder, and a stream of white milk spouted and frothed into the paper. When it was full he drank it up; it tasted so good that he had three bagfuls; the milk gurgled in his empty stomach and trickled off his chin down his neck. He said to the cow:

"O walking dairy, my thanks to you!"

He went on, well satisfied, sending loud cracks of his whip over the fields and thinking to himself:

"Nothing but Marieke is wanting here!"

Oh, to have her here with him in this grand temple of

nature, to hold her and carry her in his arms over the brooks, to roll in the soft grass together and kiss each other, to feel her soft, wholesome flesh under his fingers, what joy it would be! Unwittingly his imagination kindled and seemed to pierce her covering of clothes, to see the plump-molded body in its healthy nudity, without the blue white-spotted frock.

His eyes closed at the thought of such delights and he made a song to her:

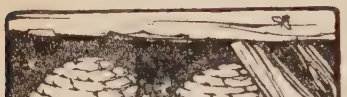
"Marieke pirrewieke!
A bird in a bush!
The dear little squeaker
Is all of a flush!
O honey! O money! The wedding day's near!"

Pallieter in his ecstasy cracked his whip, kicked at the molehills, and stamped round the young trees, lifting his feet above the ground; then he set off running through the grass and swaying flowers till he reached the banks of the Nethe. The river was high and the clouds shone in it as clear as in the sky.

When Pallieter came to the water so smooth and wide, with the purple and yellow flowers imaged so brightly

on its surface, he was calm again, quiet as a soul after earnest prayer.

The water drew him powerfully; in a moment he was bare, jumped amid a spattering of pearly water drops into the river, and swam to the flowers. It smelled like warm rice pudding, he reveled in it and threw up spouts of water, which came splashing down on to his gleaming body. After he had lain some time in the water and three boats with puffed-out sails had passed him by, he came out again.



The genial sun dried him; he plucked a white stichwort, put it between his teeth, and walked along naked, his hands behind him, chasing a frog that hopped away, startled, in front of him.

The hot stillness of noon weighed on the trees and Pallieter lay asleep under a currant bush. The garden was bright and peaceful. The fowls lay squatted in the sand and the two geese stood side by side, peering through the hedge.

There was a continual humming about the beehives and from the kitchen came the subdued voice of Charlot singing hymns. The flowers seemed steeped in their own perfume and the surface of the river glittered like the back of a fish. The fields vibrated with the twitter of birds, the windmills were motionless.

It was the smell of coffee and fried herring that woke allieter, and he murmured, yawning:

"The good Lord be thanked for opening my eyes to ee the good food waiting for my mouth."

The herrings were fat and silver white; they tasted ke good meat, and as he ate them he sang:

"Every fish knows how to swim,
Every fish knows how to swim,
Except the one that's fried."

"Pallieter," grumbled Charlot, "there's no buttermilk t the Waterschans . . ."

"Go and fetch some, ninny."

"Dost 'ee think," she snapped, angrily, "full-bodied as am, to let me go with such a heavy pail in a heat like is? Ye might be 'shamed."

"Shall I go, too?" asked Pallieter, winking at her.

"Why not by yersel'?"

"Not me, girl."

"I'll remember that!" said Charlot. "Wait a bit till e ha' need o' me!" while she put a pole through a brass ilk pan, and together they went out by the back gate f the garden into the sunny fields.

The roads were white in the sunlight, the air was full f the humming of insects like the sound of bells in the ar distance.

They took the shortest footpaths, and at every crucifix harlot crossed herself, and wherever the cherries hung w enough over the hedge Pallieter plucked some and hared them with her.

They could feel the heat of the sun on their bodies through their clothes and the cherry juice cooled their stomachs. Soon they came to a brook they had to cross but Charlot was afraid and asked:

"Gi' me a lift across, Pallieter."

"If I do we're both of us bound to fall in. Slip off yer shoes and stockings and wade over. I'll gi'e ye a hand."

"What! me wade over? For sure the water 'll reach to my knees."

"Lord a mussy, girl, and what if I do catch sight o' yer knee?"

"Never, on my life." And she looked along the stream for a place that was narrower.

"Come on wi' ye. Don't make a fuss."

"Then turn round, that ye can't see," she ordered him.

Pallieter turned away. He heard Charlot take off her stockings, turn up her skirts, and carefully step into the water. When he knew she might about have reached the middle, he turned suddenly round and saw her huge fat thighs and burst out laughing.

Charlot was so startled that she stood stock-still, then dropped her skirts suddenly so that they were soaked through, and ran back out of the water as if she had been stung. Then she began to rail at Pallieter, calling him a monkey, a turniphead, a deceitful devil, and so forth, til

she was out of breath. Pallieter stood on the other side and laughed till he was red in the face.

"Nay! nay!" cried Charlot, "I'd liefer go straight back home than go through here." And her face wrinkled up on the point of tears.

"Now don't 'ee cry, Charlot. Come, I'll lift ye over."

He jumped across the brook, seized the angry Charlot in his arms, and carried her anything but easily over the stream. He staggered under her weight, she clutching him fast, in each hand a stocking, her head pressed close against his, muttering prayers; she was frightened to death.

"There ye are, ye praying lump of flesh," said Pallieter, putting her down.

Charlot was quite out of temper and wouldn't open her mouth.

Pallieter looked at the fertile fields and smoked a big wooden pipe. The air was as still as a pool and the smoke went straight up. A sparrow hawk was hovering high in the sky where three small white clouds floated.

Pallieter could see that Charlot was sulking, and said:

"You must write to Marieke this evening and tell her to come."

"Why, yes!" she exclaimed, overjoyed. "That 'll be fine!" And the whole way her tongue never ceased flattering.

They stayed at the farm to have a drink, and started home by another way to avoid the brook.

The white sunlight had now turned golden and the shadows were twice as long. The whole sky had taken

the appearance of a sheepfold with a long row of little white clouds. The sinking light caught them and turned them rosy like new-born infants. Passing out of a wood, they came on to a stretch of rich meadows and behold—the fields were afire!

"Hold yer tongue about Marieke," cried Pallieter. "The sorrel is afire! The sorrel is afire!"

Each leaf of the tall sorrel had soaked up a gulp of sunlight, every leaf was glowing, the whole world seemed aglow.

Pallieter trembled with admiration.

"Artists, long-and-short-haired, come and look at this and pitch all yer white and yellow paint into the fire!"

It looked like water burning; it was flame within flame, spirit within spirit, a thing beyond the beauty of earthly things.

"Come on," urged Charlot. "What's there to look at in that red sorrel?"

"Wait till it's over," murmured Pallieter, motionless.

"Then I go on by meself," said Charlot, and she took up the heavy pail on her arm and, bent crooked by the weight of the buttermilk, went off down the winding foot-path.

The earth turned in the blaze of the sun, and as the flame flickered down in the west, the east filled up with blue dusk in which one white star was shining.

Not till then did Pallieter turn away.

Evening closed in, the trees stood dark and motionless as one star after the other slipped into the blue darkness

Pallieter's heart softened to the peacefulness of the earth, till it was as calm as all that was around him.

Two peasants passed him with scythes hung over their shoulders, silent, with pipes alight, and the fading light flashed on the blades.

In the distance behind him he could hear the clatter of a cart coming. Then he saw a stork—it was the mate of Peter—standing gray and motionless, peering after fish, with her long legs in a brook.

The scent of the hay flowers drifted gently over the waving grass. The sound of the cart came nearer, and against the light that still lingered in the roadway Pallieter could see the horse's feet and the high rumbling wheels. Up on the piled-up hay he recognized the servant of a farmer in the neighborhood.

"Hi!" called out Pallieter, suddenly. "Can 'ee give me a lift?"

"Why, sure! Get up!" said the girl, quite pleased.

With two steps he was up beside her on the soft grass. He stretched his arm round her wide hips and the jolting of the cart pushed his body against hers; he drew her closer and kissed her round, firm cheeks, whispering things to her that she answered with repressed giggling.

The horse went on at a slow, steady pace, the clatter of the cart getting louder as the night closed in on them and the stars grew larger and countless in the deep blue firmament. An owl flew on soft wing just over the cart. . . . They lay side by side, silent, seeing nothing but the great sky, and the stars moved with them. On

they jolted till suddenly the horse neighed. She jumped up, saying hurriedly:

"Come, get off! We're there now! Be quick!"

"Just one more kiss! Till next time!" and he jumped down off the cart.

She gave no answer, only said, "Gee up!" to the horses with a jerk of the reins.

Pallieter watched the retreating cart till it was lost in the darkness, and muttered to himself:

"Love that overtakes one tastes the best!"

And home he went over the fertile sleeping fields.

CHAPTER NINE

THE AEROPLANE

ARIEKE had come! She had been there three days, and Pallieter was as gay as a blackbird in the spring.

The same sweetness of soul that came to him from the open fields flowed out to him from her.

It was as if she were nature itself; with her he could be himself, as natural as he was among the cowslips and the rushes.

She was as clear and simple as the wind that blows across the Nethe and she was as good as the ground that brings forth the flags and clover. It made him glow to look at her and when she was there his heart unfolded. Every part of her was alive; if her mouth laughed it was because her heart was glad; her flesh glowed with health and warm impulses, like the ground in April, full of sap. Those who loved nature could not help but delight in the sight of her, and that Pallieter did. How glad he was she was there! He could have taken her up and eaten her or hurt her without knowing why. He said:

"If the earth were able to make a human being it would be one like Marieke."

While she was at the Reinaert the world was rejoicing in the festival of summer.

The heat weighed on the land and the sap simmered in the trees; but from time to time mild rains kept the ground moist and the air pure and fresh.

This kept the earth's hidden treasures rich, for so she could pour out the fullness of her heart in a lavish flood above ground.

The orchards were dappled with red cherries and the fields were golden with corn.

The grass stood thick and the butterflies, those floating flowers of the air, swept like autumn leaves over the blossoms along the wayside.

There was never more pike in the Nethe or eels in the canals; naught seemed wanting but that the brooks should run milk and honey!

It was good for Pallieter too. Surely any part of the world is a Promised Land if only the man of promise is to be found there. Put a money-grubber or a tradesman in it and the milk turns thin and blue and the honey full of meal. But this was a double summer, one in a thousand!

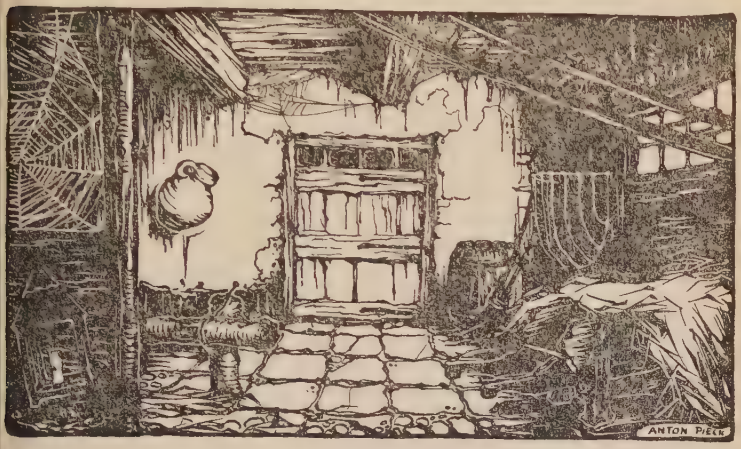
One of these mornings, as the day was just dawning, Pallieter awoke with a song on his lips, but stopped short, for there from out his bed he caught sight of the first mowers in the fields.

His heart jumped, and he rushed off in his shirt to Marieke's room and shouted through the keyhole:

"The mowers are in the hayfield! Come and look! Be quick!" Then he went back to his room, put on his

rousers, and began to knock and call again at Marieke's door.

After a lot of noise the door opened, and there stood Marieke with bare feet, in a red-cotton frock, and a white kerchief on her neck.



"How pretty ye are!" burst from his lips, and he felt as if there was a thread at the end of every finger drawing him toward Marieke. "Come," he cried, "or I'm done for!" And he seized her hand and they hurried downstairs, pushed their feet into the brown smoked clogs, and went out of doors.

The mare was stamping in her stable and Pallieter suddenly took it into his head to go on horseback.

They opened the stable door and led out Beiaard, the white mare. It was an enormous horse; the veins on its body were as thick as a man's finger. She shook her

great head and the thick matted mane that hung on both sides of her neck waved like a flag. Thrills of pleasure quivered through her hide, and the heavy feet stamped into the ground and the long tail waved to and fro. Her neigh rang over the fields like a pleasant laugh.

Pallieter put Marieke sideways on the horse's back and mounted up behind her. They both sank below the huge neck and had to put their heads close together to see anything of the landscape.

Pressing her snorting nostrils against her massive chest, Beiaard stepped on to the river path; her great feet struck into the red sand like heavy flat hammers. The beast enjoyed it all, too, snuffing up the clear morning air, playing as a foal, tossing her head, lifting up her hind legs, and neighing continuously.

The air was fresh and very bright, the night dew still hung round the roots of the grass, some white mist hung over the river, but the horizon was clear. Three larks poised overhead in the pale greenish sky and the last star was dissolving in the spreading light of the rising sun.

They came to the meadows, where sets of mowers were busy already. Pallieter brought the horse to a stand and gazed delightedly at the generous work of summer.

Wide streaks of mowed grass were already visible here

and there, and the odor of its sap wafted up from the pale-green pathways. The swish of scythes hummed all around them, the whetting and scraping on the blades and the voices of the men and women—weak and trivial sounds under the great canopy of the opening day—became sonorous in the long aisles of meadowland.

Then all at once the sun burst into sight and set the world alight on all sides and flashed sparks from the scythes.

"Now," said Pallieter, "the sun has consecrated the scythes."

They rode on farther along the soft field path and the brilliant trees into the open meadows.

Beiaard went at a brisk trot and her feet sent clods of earth up over their heads. They laughed joyfully as they bounced up and down; the warmth from the horse's back warmed them through and the fresh morning air cooled their cheeks.

They rode alongside great cornfields with red poppies and blue cornflowers on their edges. Sometimes a breath of wind ruffled the ears and a gleam of pale gold swept across the yellow corn. A hare rushed across their path and in a downtrodden furrow they found a green cock crowing among a party of white hens. Pigeons circled above the farm; they showed dark and then white and sometimes their wings shone transparent in the sunlight. That morning there was a cuckoo as well.

Marieke shook with laughter, and the corner of her white kerchief came loose and fluttered in the wind.

Sitting sideways on the horse, with the trotting her skirts had shifted higher and higher so that Pallieter could see her bare legs and above one knee the white embroidery of her drawers. At that sight he forgot all about the fields and the azure of the heavens.

He could hardly speak, his heart thumped so rapidly. It made him wild with joy. He bent down and caught up a handful of ears of corn, roots and all, and waved them above his head.

He urged on the horse, and Beiaard stretched herself out and quickened her pace. They were riding fast now on the soft road that wound in and out like a brook in the Ardennes. The horse leaned over to one side as they came to the turnings and Marieke twisted the mane in her hands and laughed merrily.

In this way they reached the fields laden with grass and corn and then Beiaard stopped to drink at a brook.

Marieke turned round to Pallieter, out of breath and panting, hardly able to speak, mopping her face with her kerchief. She looked at Pallieter, her eyes wide open with delight. He tapped her hand for her to look at the four towers that were to be seen from this point—Duffel, Mylstraat, Hunt, and Mechelen—and the Reinaert lay behind the trees, far back on the last curve of the river. Seen from here the country of the Nethe was rich and rare, the very bosom of the Earth.

The cornfields, the green and brown tilled land with farms and tall trees on it, divided in irregular patches, sloped down to the low-lying meadows on the river bank, and on the other side rose ground equally fertile, now

hid from view by the blaze of the sun, which filled the valley like a wind, and Pallieter and Marieke could only look at it with one eye closed.

Waving his open hand over the valley, Pallieter said: "That is my grandest room, my reception room. The sky is my ceiling, the sun is my clock, the grass my carpet, the rain my curtains, but my couch—that has no bedfellow."

Marieke turned red and laughed; she was compelled to look again right into Pallieter's eyes, and then looked down again. Pallieter saw it all and it told him more than enough, it was just as if a door opened on to the delicious smell of apples.

Then a silence fell on them, while in the heart of each the greatest miracle of all was taking place.

Suddenly a sound of snorting was audible. Both of them looked up and, Heavens! there hovered an airplane high up in the bright blue; it roared and whirred through the air like a steamboat on the water.

Marieke spread out both arms with a cry of pleasure and Pallieter was dumfounded with emotion; he swore under his breath with admiration, turned pale, and tears rushed into his eyes.

It was beautiful, graceful as a heron, gliding through the air without any shock or jerk; the wings and tail quite white against the clear blue.

The air was noisy with the rattle of steel and all the people in the valley left their work and came out of their houses to look up at it.

"It beats the angels," said Pallieter, solemnly.

"I can scarce believe my eyes," cried Marieke. They watched it, turning their heads as it curved in its flight.

It was as if something holy descended on the earth. The pigeons flew away, startled, and voices were calling on all sides.

Then all at once the airplane appeared to stand still, just as a hawk hovers in sight of prey; it made a movement downward, then swept in a semicircle over the landscape, and then in one flexible line swooped from the dizzy height and came down just like a crow on the other side of the Nethe. The cows that had been grazing quietly took fright and rushed away in disorder.

"Come on!" yelled Pallieter.

"But there's the water!" cried Marieke, frightened.

'Water! Water! Over the water! Gee up!" And he pressed Beiaard with his heels, jerked the reins, and the horse galloped straight ahead, stretching herself out till her hoofs hardly touched the ground, the mane and tail streaming out behind. Its speed tore the air and clods of soil flew up into the trees.

Pallieter and Marieke sat bending forward, lifting themselves up to be lighter; the trees rushed past, the corn was like a pale flash, and the ground slipped under them like water.

Pallieter shouted and called, "Gee up!"

They rode straight on through the cabbages and carrots, over the brooks, through the alder bushes straight on, and the earth shook; birds flew up and fowls scattered cluttering out of the way.

Pallieter looked up. From all the footpaths and the

Fields people came running and there lay the Nethe full and peaceful.

Pallieter's clogs fell off, Marieke gave a cry and Beiaard plunged with a great splash into the smooth river. It was like a bomb bursting and the spouting up of a hundred fountains. The water flew up, broke into white waves, and surged and splashed up on to the bank. The water reached to their chest and flowed over their shoulders.

Beiaard swam across through the swirling water and heaved herself with difficulty up on to the bank, dripping like a thundercloud. Yonder lay the airplane with a crowd round it, heads pressed close together, when horse and riders came up to it, spattering water on all sides. The crowd pushed back, and there was the airship white and light, as if a hand could have lifted it into the air again.

There were two flying men in leathern suits with woolen caps over their ears. While one was pouring oil into the reservoir, the other was screwing at the huge shining propeller.

Pallieter asked, "How much d'ye ask to let us see the Scheldt?"

Both men laughed at the question and promptly refused. But Pallieter persisted, offering more and more, till they at last gave way.

He rubbed his hands and said, "Now we'll go together to the land of the sun."

"There's only room for two," said the pilot.

"That's a pity, my girl," he said, "but I'll take you with me in my heart."

Marieke felt shy and stroked the horse's mane.

One of the flying-men gave Pallieter his leathern coat and what did it matter that his trousers were wet; it was cool!

He sat behind the pilot, who held the rudder. The other man gave several turns to the propeller and it began to revolve so rapidly that it became invisible, and Pallieter felt the force of a thousand winds on his nose. Men's hats flew off and the women's skirts flew up.

The propeller began to roar, and then the machine hobbled forward and got up from the ground before Pallieter was aware of it.

In one swoop he saw the trees beneath him; the crowd rushed along with them, agog with wonder, and yonder in her red dress rode Marieke on the white horse along the river bank, waving her handkerchief and calling out, "Au revoir!" But he heard nothing because of the noise of the propeller.

The airplane flew higher and farther with tremendous speed. He looked round at the world that lay beneath him where everything was diminishing and dissolving, as if he were sitting still and the earth turned quickly and dropped into the depths.

He felt nothing of his own weight any more, just as if he had no body.

Higher and higher! and all around he saw the blue horizon gradually unfolding.

What were the woods, the houses, the villages, towers and fields the trees and the Nethe? Why they were something only to be seen with a magnifying glass! Light was all round them and four thousand yards below him the whole world was spread out lovely, splendid, and overwhelming, like the unfolding of a great mystery.

"O how beautiful the earth is!" said Pallieter.

The whole air was filled with the noise of the propeller, as if they were riding on the sound.

Pallieter's soul grew immense with happiness. To sit on the wide air, to be a part of the wind, surrounded and saturated with light and atmosphere, shooting and cutting through it like an arrow aimed at eternity—he felt drunk with space! There beneath him lay the world, so beautiful and precious with color and sunlight, so complete and perfect, holy and powerful as the end of all things.

Pallieter was thrilled through and through and muttered, swearing: "How beautiful! How beautiful!" And then, "God, I thank thee that thou hast dropped me upon the earth!"

Down in the deeps below, a narrow silver thread, the Scheldt, wound its way through the country, and near to was Antwerp, the great town with her thousands of houses and hundreds of streets; beyond that, far, far

off where the river lost itself in the horizon, lay the white, soft shining of the great sea.

And there was Brussels, Mechelen, and all about were little towns and villages. Pallieter could have covered up ten of them at once with one hand, and he said:

"Now that's where people live; that's where they live and they all think they know all about it! Water in a bottle! O Thomas à Kempis! If ye had been up in an airplane your book would have been a thousand times finer than it is!"

CHAPTER TEN

SUMMER RAIN

T was evening. The scent of the white roses lingered in the amber-colored air. Pallieter was smoking leisurely, his back against a tree, contemplating his newly raked garden.

The entrancing joys of light and air had sobered down with the fall of evening and a great calm possessed his soul.

The smoke that rose out of the convent chimneys dwindled to a straight white line which hung motionless against the trees on the rampart.

Three clear strokes rang out of the tower and were re-echoed on Pallieter's heart. The little tower looked black against the liquid yellow sky as he strolled over the rampart to the lonely white convent. Gray twilight crept slowly along the white walls and the cobblestones gleamed white. The houses seemed twice as high, the doors were closed, the streets silent—only a pair of swallows swept high up through the air, squealing.

Pallieter went tiptoe, stood listening to the silence, and entered the church. No one was there. The polished chairs stood soberly in rows and the altar lamp

winked steadfastly like an eye. He sat down, and the unbroken stillness made his eyes close peacefully. His soul unfolded itself, all other things dropped from him as a forgotten dream—and there he sat.

"I can feel what God is, but all the same I'm still a human being," he said.

When he came out the yellow had faded from the sky and it was hung with gray clouds, but the day was not dead yet. In his own house all the doors stood open and it was still dark within. No one was there.

Under the shed roof he saw the blade of a heavy scythe shining and took it into his head to go a-mowing. A blackbird in the garden whistled a few notes now and then and Pallieter said, "That means rain."

He went to mow in the horse meadow. He whetted his scythe and the sound echoed through the grass as it fell, and the scythe hummed.

Pallieter made great, sweeping movements as he mowed, and he was a mighty, dark figure against the pale light of the dying day, the light flashing continually on his scythe blade.

Suddenly a rustling came through the grass and he could see a bunch of yellow flowers, and above them faintly gleamed the face of Marieke. He was glad. She

came nearer, saying, admiringly, "It looked just as if a giant was a-mowing."

"May I smell?" asked Pallieter and he pushed his face against the tender flowers.

"'Tis for yerself," murmured Marieke, softly.

"I can smell yer own soul in 'em, there!" And he took the flowers in his arm and looked at her gratefully. It made him feel like a child.

"Come now," he said, "let's sit down, and tell me where ye ha' plucked 'em." He sat down on the mown grass and laid the nosegay loose on his knee. She sat down beside him and told him how she had been with Charlot to pray in the field chapel of St. Anne and on the way had asked a farmer if she might have some of these flowers, because he had so often said he liked their honey-laden scent.

They stopped speaking. Not a leaf rustled on the trees and from out the dark kitchen came the loud murmur of Charlot's voice telling her beads.

Suddenly Marieke cried out, startled: "A shower! It's raining!"

Pallieter held his hand open, and after a pause one great cool raindrop fell on to it. "As soft as melted healing balm.

Great raindrops fell now and then from the sky that was hidden by the trees, sometimes near to them, sometimes a way off. They could hear them bursting on the trees, they could feel them drop on their hands or their faces and splash into Marieke's nosegay. Sometimes came more, strewn as with a lavish hand, then it stopped and after a few seconds fell again in single splashes. They listened for each in turn like something important.

The flower scents floated out and wafted slowly round them, the blackbird in the garden uttered clear full notes from his golden throat, telling his delight in this luxurious shower bath. It seemed to Pallieter as if the silly bird caught up the raindrop and let it bubble in his throat, so clearly did he warble. Some notes he seemed to suck in and slobber over, rolled them up again, and dropped them out in perfect pearls of sound.

All the time from the kitchen came the sound of "Ave Maria" in a never-ending prayer. Pallieter caught up one of the drops on his tongue and, looking at Marieke, said with emotion:

"'Tis a heavenly evening, eh, Marieke?"

She looked into his face without a word. He took

hold of her wet hand and hid it under his large fingers.

"O Marieke!" he said. He felt as if he could have squeezed her hand till it broke, so full his heart was of love. His soul was ready to burst.

He drew her toward him till she was close up to him, but she bent her head and he could see nothing of her face.

"Marieke!" he said, with a great sigh. But she did not move, and said nothing, while the great raindrops splashed down slowly on the leaves and the blackbird sang till the last streak of light passed away. The kitchen was quiet now, till suddenly light burst into the window and Charlot called out at the door: "Come in, all of ye. Dinner is near ready."

Marieke drew her hand from Pallieter's, stood up, and went in without a word.

Pallieter stayed where he was, overwhelmed with the rush of happiness—surely Marieke loved him—stretched out his legs, and let the mild rain fall upon him like a healing balm.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE WALKÜRE RIDE

THE heat was blazing and stifling, the sun had burst deep cracks in the ground, the vegetables looked as if they were stuck in with clay and were the color of a dishcloth.

Pallieter sat with Marieke in the blue shade of the sunflowers and elderberry bushes, eating fresh-plucked cherries out of his straw hat. The elderberry smelled spicy, the sunflowers hummed with bees.

Pallieter stood straight up, stretched himself, and called out: "Marieke, look at the light there! Look at t! It's like music!"

Marieke got up, looked at the country flaming in the sunlight, with her hand over her eyes.

Not a living soul was moving there, not a sign of life. The heat lay simmering over the roads as over a stove, and silence weighed on the earth like lead.

Pallieter saw how richly the sunlight lighted up Marieke and the cherries he had hung in her ears were like bits of coral against her soft cheek; and when she felt

his eyes upon her she called out, jerking her body saucily, "Let's go a-rowing!"

"See who'll be first at the river!" shouted Pallieter, and they ran as hard as they could through the garden into the blazing fields. They got there at the same time and Pallieter lifted Marieke like a feather on to the dyke.

They stepped into the swaying boat just as Charlot's deep voice shouted:

"Clean daft ye are to go rowing i' this heat. Ye'd far better sit and eat cherries."

"We ha' sun to eat," called back Pallieter, and with two strong pulls at the oars they let themselves drift down stream through the sun-baked fields that lay blistering on both sides of them. Marieke sat behind Pallieter and they let their hands hang in the lukewarm water.

They were both silent and looked at each other now and then as if surprised, and then they smiled and their eyes brightened. They drifted along without noticing, and the fields and trees in front of them shuffled past, while the further ones and the distant haycocks seemed to move with them. Not a breath of wind stirred over this immense landscape; the stillness weighed on Marieke so heavily that she asked:

"Play a tune, will 'ee?"

"I've no flute with me," said Pallieter.

"Well then giv' us a song."

So he sung:

"There once was a prince and princess
Who loved one another so true—"

"The only difference now," said Pallieter when it was ended, "is that the old queen Charlot would ha' been burning four candles to keep the young uns from drowning."

Marieke's face turned rosy.

Just then at a bend in the river Pallieter saw a man fishing, motionless as a statue. He called out: "There's one as stands waiting for one 'ee ha' never set eyes on."

The fisherman looked up carelessly and then dropped his eyes again to the little red float.

They went on farther and Marieke cried out all at once, pointing to the sky:

"Thunderclouds! thunderclouds!"

There they were! On every side along the horizon, bulging narrow clouds were pushing up their heads. They looked like rough-hewn pillars upholding the blue ceiling of the sky.

"Are ye frighted o' thunder?" asked Pallieter.

"Me? Why, no! I like to hear it!"

"That's it; then we'll ha' a bit of fun. Let it come if it likes." And he rubbed his hands and laughed at the thought of it.

A shadow came creeping yonder over the brassy glitter of the fields and in a moment half the landscape was dark-

ened. As they drifted on, the higher clouds began to shrink and the columns of white crumbled, were kneaded together and pulled out, then stretched into pieces of leaden gray that shut out the blue sky and a gray tent seemed to spread over the whole scene.

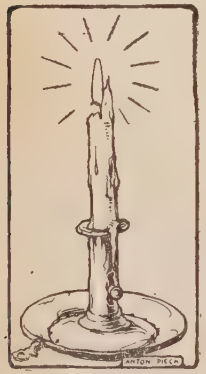
A fierce breeze whipped up the sand from the roads and blew it along in clouds; the trees rattled and shrieked; pigeons whirled along the dark sky like bits of white paper, and a flock of crows swirled toward the church tower as if they were black rags.

Suddenly the wind ceased and a sudden stillness stopped the heart beating; then away over the river a red wriggling streak flashed against the purple darkness and a dull hesitating rumble of thunder rolled behind the clouds. In the far-away farm windows appeared little sparks of votive candles.

From three sides at once, now higher in the air, the lightning flashed; thunder banged and rumbled, growled and bumped and made the ground tremble.

"It's coming! It's coming!" cried out Pallieter and Marieke, and there fell the first great lukewarm drops on their thin clothes splashing cool on to their steaming bodies as a divine refreshment. Away over the distant farmhouse the landscape was washed out by a rushing

raincloud that broke in a shower on to the water. It was a deluge and wetted them through in an instant. The rain fell in streams on the fields all round and the mist hung a foot above the ground; lightning flashed and twisted, and the thunder rolled and crackled till it was deafening.



They saw a peasant woman with her skirts thrown over her head run across the fields to shelter by a woodstack.

But Pallieter and Marieke laughed and enjoyed it, the water running over their faces till they shone. On they drifted till they reached the field where the miller's cows and horses were anxiously lowing and stamping.

Pallieter had a fine idea.

"Let's land! Let's land!" he shouted

"What for? What is it?" asked Marieke.

"On horse or a-cowback. Jump!"

"That's right! That's it!" cried Marieke. And they both jumped on to the bank. Pallieter lifted Marieke on to a big chestnut mare.

"Hold fast to the mane," he called out, and he sprang on to the first horse that came, slapped it on the flank with his open hand, and it started off straight ahead, followed by the whole herd, about twenty cows and horses.

The whole troop stampeded away through the driving rain in one mass, Marieke holding on to the mane of the frightened mare and shrieking with laughter. Pallieter

sat his horse easily, waving his arms and singing with all his might the sonorous song of the chorus from Wagner's "Walküre." It rang out like a trumpet.

And it thundered and rained and lightened as if the Judgment Day had come; while the mass of neighing horses and lowing cows thudded on as if to destroy all before it, the ground shook and creaked and trembled under their weight, and clods of earth flew over the heads of the straining bodies.

Marieke's wet hair was shaken loose by the jerking and flew out like a fan. Pallieter urged his horse on and the massive clump of creatures rushed forward more furiously, as if setting its force against that of the elements. Yet above the lowing, neighing, thundering, and trampling rose Pallieter's voice: "Ta, ta! ta, ta!" It was tremendous!

As the thunder began to die down, Pallieter drew up and the heavy mass came to a standstill, steaming and snorting in the clear sunshine which now flowed through the broken clouds on to the field, and a brilliantly colored rainbow arched triumphantly over the whole earth. Pallieter, still on horseback, wet to the skin, was looking at Marieke on her gigantic mare, and she smiled at him, dripping as she was with rain, her hair loose, panting and glowing with pleasure.

Through the wet white musin dress that clung to her rosy skin his eye could follow the fine curves of her hips and thighs and the molding of the firm young bosom. There she sat so happy, so divine against the vast dark heavens; behind her the sunny fair green land with trees,

houses, and windmills and over her head the great arch of the rainbow.

Ay! That was beauty indeed! and his heart was moved within him. He pushed his horse up against hers, took her suddenly into his arms and cried out:

"Ye are my wife, my honey-sweet wife!"

And Marieke, with a long-drawn sigh, threw her wet arms round his strong neck and asked, simply but intensely:

"When?"

"Within four weeks from now!" he said, joyfully, and gave her a long wet kiss on her lips and her dainty white teeth.

Charlot was still looking pale with fright from the thunderstorm and welcomed them gladly.

"Is my bed wide enough for two?" asked Pallieter.

"What say 'ee . . . ?" and she stared with amazement at Marieke leaning in Pallieter's arm.

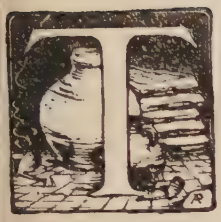
"I'm to marry Pallieter," cried Marieke, joyfully.

"Ye? Ye?" stammered Charlot, trembling. "Ye, my godchild, marry the boy? . . . Are ye? . . . O Jesus! Maria! Joseph! . . . and she fell on Pallieter's neck and wept aloud with joy.

That went to Pallieter's heart and a tear got into his eye; he bit his lip to keep from crying, but that didn't help, not the least bit in the world.

CHAPTER TWELVE

MOONLIGHT



THE farmer of the Waterbulwark had brought in his last load of hay on Saturday, so on Sunday there was a feast—pancakes and sweet beer.

Pallieter was there with Marieke, and they sat with the whole family, laborers and maidservants, at a great round table; doors and windows wide open, the day was so hot. The blinding noonday heat seemed to be baking into the surrounding fields and meadows; it made a bluish mist in the low room with its white walls and brass milk pails. Inside, there was laughing and chatter, a noise like a fowl-yard, and large red hands grabbed at the steaming yellow pancakes as they were brought in on the piled-up dishes. They ate them with sugar, syrup, and butter—one sweet wasn't enough; the sweat stood on their foreheads and they drank the brown thick-looking beer all the time to cool themselves.

Every door and window space was a clear picture—roads running through the cornfields or green meadows, here and there a glimpse of the river, red roofs peeping out among the thick trees, grazing cows, white butter-

flies above the roadside, woods and quiet windmills in the distance, and pigeons sweeping across the blue sky.

There were peasants among them who could put away a dozen pancakes and still look expectantly into the seething kitchen beyond. Their mouths and hands were sticky and greasy and they had no time to wipe their noses. Flies were strewn over the table as it might be currants from a cake.

Pallieter ate on and on, smacking his lips now over the cinnamon taste, then the egg and the butter, snuffing up each in turn; he had just set his teeth into his eleventh pancake. While eating he looked on the quiet sunny fields and heard a church bell tinkling, at the greedy flushed faces round him, and his own sweet Marieke. He slyly gave her a pinch in the side and made her jump up and giggle. Under the table he kept his foot on hers. His face shone with sweat and grease and his hands were sticky.

When the twenty of them had eaten up about one hundred and fifty pancakes, the plates and glasses were taken away and gin and brandy placed on the table. Then pipes were lighted and a cloud of smoke drifted over their heads.

"A song! a song!" was shouted and Pallieter began to sing "The Fishers of Blankenberg," and when the chorus

came the whole circle swayed arm in arm from one side to the other.

As soon as this was ended and they were all melting with their shouting and shoving, Marieke was called on for a song. She stood up and sang with a pleasant, rather quavering voice, "The Night Watchman." [1]

Pallieter followed the song with soft whistling, and at the chorus, "And clap y'r hands with tikke, tikke, tik, and let y'r feet beat tikke, tikke, tok, as he makes his first go-round. O!" they all clapped as if they had whips in their hands and beat with their feet like hammers. Everybody wanted to make a noise, and sing as well, and shake themselves about. They all had a turn and very often they all knew the chorus, so they could stamp and jump and beat as hard as they liked.

Their clothes were by this time saturated and clung damply to their bodies, their throats were hoarse, and they sipped the French brandy and spiced gin as it might be water.

"Who's got a good tale to tell?" cried a plump maiden. "Summat as 'll make our sides shake."

"I knows un," called out a farmer. All heads bent forward to listen, their mouths ready with a smile, while they clutched their glasses and each man pushed an arm round his woman partner.

The farmer told a good spicy tale of a verger and the priest's servant maid; and did any of the others know one? The end of this story was so ludicrous that they shook with laughter, and several of the company were

[1] The Flemish and the Dutch night watchmen always carried rattles.

eager to tell a better one, and on it went from one tale to another, the coarseness increasing, till it seemed time to send the farmer's children outside to play. So many were ready to begin that in a moment there were three or four tales going on at the same time round the table.

Pallieter was not behindhand, and Marieke, who did as if she did not hear, began to stroke a St. Anne's cat and feed it with spice cake.

The roars of laughter rolled up to the rafters at the end of each recital, and in spite of the text, "No swearing allowed," the oaths poured out as the most complete expression of their real enjoyment and intense satisfaction.

At last a golden breeze floated in from the fields to cool the room, the fierce glare on the sunlit land burned down to a quiet copper-colored glow, and the sun sank in one red flame behind a distant mass of cloud. The sun filled up the doorway into a shining square and lit up some of the figures in the bluish atmosphere of the room brilliantly, and the elder blossom by the windows sent in its aromatic fragrance.

Once Pallieter went outside and looked at the fields and the sky and muttered to himself:

"'Twill be an evening in a thousand!"

The sun had disappeared and the shadows had vanished; only broad white rays like the horns of a Moses stretched through the soft tufts of cloud to the zenith, as if behind the world a mighty saint were standing.

Quite entranced, he went inside and said to Marieke: Come, let's go and talk to God for a bit!"

They rose to go, but the farm folk would not hear of it and begged and teased them to stay on.

"I mun go a-courting with Marieke awhile. I ha' got to try my best," said Pallieter, "for termorrer she'll be gone home."

They understood that, then every one wanted to shake hands with her and say good-by.

"She'll come here again to be wed," said Pallieter, "and then ye'll all come to the party!"

At this they all began to sing at once:

"How can we live without our dear Marieke?
Without our dear Marieke we can't live at all!"

Out of doors there was a delicious atmosphere full of all kinds of scents.

They strolled along the river bank without speaking, subdued by the wonderful beauty of the evening. The sultry Sabbath day was closing in peacefully, night was creeping soundless over the thousand fragrant haycocks in the meadows.

From the little white houses on the other side of the river came the music of a concertina and a big bell was tolling for vespers. Along the river bank, clearly

reflected in the water, went two children, one in white and one in a red frock, their arms full of dandelions and a little black dog running after them. The light seemed to come up from the ground.

There were many birds high up in the sky and the gray banks of thin cloud were motionless. The evening damps hung heavy on the grass, not a leaf stirred on the poplar trees—light, water, even time seemed to be at a standstill as if awaiting orders to move on. It felt uncanny.

And then from behind a tall thin poplar tree on the slope of the grassy hill a full red moon rose up into this enchanted peace. It made the world seem all at once larger, young again, and quite cheerful.

"Oh," exclaimed Pallieter, "'t makes yer fall on yer knees." And he stood spellbound, as if he'd never seen the moon rise before. Of course this was the miracle everything was waiting for! Now the evening went on with its work, and the bats came out. A great flock of

crows, sleepily cawing, flew across the sky and scattered themselves into the distant convent woods, where it was dark already. Dogs began to bark at the moon and—the day was dead.

They strolled on and her head leaned against his arm, and they came to the Eelstream that runs into the Nethe. A little wooden bridge was fixed across just where a huge old willow tree drooped its branches into the stream and made an arbor. They pulled the branches aside to get in and stood in a little green room.

It was a tiny temple perfumed with the scent of green branches. In front of them flowed the river beside its meadows, and there hung the moon, now turned golden in a blue-gray sky. It was a sweet place and the lovers' heads drooped together and their arms leaned against the mossy bridge.

A little breeze rippled over the water against the rushes and it rained moonlight on to the river, little bubbles of moonlight; then the breeze sheered off and the face of the moon lay motionless in the water again, pure and childlike as the soul of a saint. An owl flapped low over the water and vanished among the reeds.

They were alone under the little dome of branches, cut off from the moonlight world, and their hearts grew big with love in this solitude.

Pallieter took her into his arms and kissed her without stopping, her tender cheeks, her moist mouth, and closed eyes. She seemed to melt into his passion and slipped unresisting into his strong embrace. Intangible rays of moonlight drifted through the screen of branches and

laid radiant streaks on her face and shoulders. Pallieter looked at her entranced. "Like a dream, a dream!" he murmured and laid his lips on her hair and face; with almost fierce teeth he bit in her tender neck and cheek; he could have crushed her (with love) and just as this dome of leaves shut off the world from its precincts and closed in the soul of the old tree, so Pallieter was aware of life only because his feet touched the ground; he was oblivious of all past events, of all thought for the future or any time but this supreme moment. They did not speak; there was no sound within the sacred chamber of the tree but their own votive kisses. Marieke's beautiful large eyes opened and looked at him, languid and overwhelmed with happiness; she took a long, long look, and without a word her eyes closed again slowly in ecstasy.

This look went to the bottom of Pallieter's heart, so that tears rushed into his eyes and his flesh quivered, and again his mouth sought hers; her head sank on to his shoulder and her arms went round his neck. Leaning against the bridge, he raised her into his arms and held her as a mother does her child.

There in the open, above the misty-blue ground the moonlight grew whiter, more mysterious like the vague dreams of childhood. The smell of water, hay, and elder flowers saturated the air on all sides, and from among the trees round the Ringen farm a nightingale was fluting little pearl drops of song. The chirp of a cricket grew louder in the stillness . . . They turned round at the sound of creaking wood and whirling water, pulled the

branches aside and saw a fisherman in a small boat dragging up his net and in it a jumping fish flashed silver. His work was humble enough, but it looked like magic in the golden night. Oh, the beautiful white night that lay open before them, as if they were looking through a window!

"Come, let's out and feel the moonlight on us!"

They came from under the willow tree into the open air that lay so bright, so immense upon the pale sleeping earth.

The moon by this time was as clear as crystal and the light that radiated from her on to the ground and among the stars was a greenish blue, all milky. It was now as light as a subdued daylight and the tall poplars could be seen, the corn showed faintly, and the sleeping cows in the fields. In the park the copper beeches and green plane trees could be distinguished, with a white-gleaming statue, an armless Venus, on its ivy-clad pedestal. A thin mist hung over the brooks.

They came down off the dyke along a meadow where a cow lay sleeping, staring with dull eyes at the moon or the quiet fields. They went on into the large field among the rows of haycocks all bathed with moonlight. They wandered among the fragrant hay, and their fast-clinging bodies made but one shadow on the shaven grass. The moon moved alongside them, reflected in a narrow streamlet.

"Come, let's sit down a bit!"

They sank into one of the great haycocks, laid their arms round one another and pressed deeper into the hay

like a nest. She snuggled her pretty head into the curve of his shoulder and there they were curled up together like a pair of young rabbits.

"The night is holy!" he said, quietly, and looked up at the sky flooded with moonlight and pale stars. Oh, the stars! they lay scattered about like white sand, clustering together here and there like wisps of hair, and some glittering like diamonds.

All the deep gates of heaven were set open and the Milky Way filtered across it like incense.

Out of this light motionless eternity of worlds there dropped now and then the short existence of a falling star. Pallieter was entranced and his eyes turned from one star to the other—from the great Libra to Orion, from the Polestar to the Three Kings, and so on; he looked out the most distant ones, and then those beyond, mere needle points, and when his eye could see no more stars, only the pure mist of the great firmament, then his thoughts burst forth: "Stars, stars everywhere—overhead, below, and all around him! . . ." Pallieter was crushed and overwhelmed and cried unwittingly: "Why? Why?"

And suddenly there fell upon him the weight of the endless immensity of star-filled space and his heart was crushed and he sighed out: "O jewels of God, my soul quakes at your beauty! . . . Marieke, Marieke, look up! . . ." But Marieke slumbered gently on his arm.

"Better so!" he said, directly. That, too, was beautiful, so in keeping with the great, pure, peaceful night, and a

warm tenderness flooded his heart; he bent down in adoration and he gave her a feather-like kiss.

It was so beautiful and tender, he could not wake her, and he moved his foot so as not to hinder her. He snuffed up the fine perfumes of the night and watched two small stars that touched and seemed to melt together.

Through the clear sky there floated one small white cloud. It drifted forward, hesitating, as if magnetized by the moon; it passed just beneath and all at once turned iridescent, pink, green, and lavender, like a crumpled rainbow passing in front of the moon; then it passed on, losing its coloring, turned white, and drifted lonely away; it was a transient smile of the night.

The far-off nightingale gurgled out its music, and now and then a frog croaked.

The night grew more brilliant, the mist grew denser over the brooks and hung above the ground.

The intense stillness vibrated, the moonbeams almost shimmered audibly. The grass lay flat.

Pallieter, lulled by the silence of the night, blinking at the moon through half-shut eyes and, flooded by its rays, dropped slowly into a deep sleep.

The mighty night completed its work. Stars drifted and fell and the moon shed her brilliance on all, then turned faintly red and slipped down to the west with lowered eyelids.

The two human beings slept an earthly sleep, they breathed with Mother Earth, one breath, one heartbeat, the same silence and the same life.

They slept, their heads together, lost in one another, and woke, shivering, at break of day while the mist still hung over the fields and clung to the haycocks.

It was day. The flowers were still closed, but cocks were crowing, a dog barked, and a cuckoo called from the misty wood.

Mariecke started and looked round delighted, rubbed the sleep out of her eyes, yawned, and laid her head back on Pallieter's shoulder a moment; then she got up out of the warm nest and laughed at their damp and crumpled clothes and the hay sticking in their hair.

Arm in arm, chattering and humming, they tripped off home, fresh as daisies, longing for clean clothes and warm coffee.

A shepherd blew his horn and the bells began to ring; it was Day!

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

HONEY

HE beehives were overflowing with honey. The whole garden smelled of it, and the whole afternoon Pallieter had been busy getting out the honey and putting it into earthenware jars. Charlot was helping, carrying pots into the cool cellar one by one. Both of them were dripping with sweat, sticky with wax and honey, and licking off their fingers all the time. The dog, Loebas, kept an eye on the work and greedily slobbered up what was spilled.

Pallieter was delighted with the harvest of sweetness and sang at the top of his voice, and Charlot chattered the whole time about the honey and the weather. She was so overcome by the heat, and had so little fear of getting stung, that she went about on bare feet and wore only a short petticoat that reached only the calves of her legs; her sleeves were rolled up high and her arms stuck out of her red bodice as fat as an infant's body. Her dress was loosened at the neck, which showed all its thick, fleshy collar bone with the greasy ribbons of her scapular, and her figure seemed only one huge bulk.

Her face burned like an oven and oozed moisture like a sponge.

She started talking about Marieke.

"Why mun ye wait till autumn afore ye wed?"

"It will be cool enough to snuggle close together."

"Hold yer tongue," grumbled Charlot; but a minute later she began again, gently, quite pleased with herself. "An' me, as always thought to be a nun, I am glad as I never did, howiver could Marieke get along here wi'out me?"

"Well, well!" snapped Pallieter, "she might as well sleep along o' you."

"That's all very well," said Charlot, stretching herself up, "but Marieke's my godchild and ye can reckon there's no harm shall come to her."

"Why, ye can be sure, an' if I wed, for what shall I want a servant any more?" he said just to tease her.

At this Charlot burst out; "Ay! ay! So I must be gone! Sent away, and me an orphan! Well, I never! Who wu'd ha' believed it! That's what I git for all my pains; that's my thanks from them as I've brought up from the cradle! The Lord ha' mercy on me!"

"Now, now!" said Pallieter, comforting her. "Hadn't I just forgotten ye were an orphan!"

And so they settled it and the work got finished.

Charlot put on another skirt, pulled down her sleeves, and carried the largest pot of honey to the priest's house.

Pallieter took one for his friend Fransoo, the painter, and one for the almshouse, on the same side of the river.

He rowed a good stretch up the river and crossed to the other side, where he fastened his boat, and with one pot on his shoulder and the other under his arm he followed a steep footpath, whistling a brisk tune.

A swarm of bees, drones, and wasps hovered all the way over the pots, and he stopped at a little inn to quench his thirst; the beer was poor and when he came out of doors, again a cloud of insects had settled on the honey pots.

Just on ahead above the trees the old mill came in sight, its sails turning gently in the south wind, sunshine glittering on its brass weathercock and lighting up the green moss that decorated its old black body.

A beautiful old windmill! It leaned over a bit to one side, but it was a dignified figure towering over the landscape as proud as a church and visible from all sides.

Pallieter loved to climb into it for the fine outlook over the country. He reveled in the panorama of the elements; to watch the work of the winds sweeping blue shadows over the land and the screens of rain that shut off half the world with showers while the sun shone bright from behind the clouds on to some hamlet with windmills. He could stare for hours at the growing and withering of the clouds. The mornings and evenings were longer and more impressive, seen from this height, and the nights slower and deeper. The winters were pictures by Breughel, and with your own eyes you could see the spring coming out of the south, and there was always to be seen on all sides, fine or shower, the sight

of the farm work, man tilling the ground for his bread. A sight for Moses!

Pallieter quickly mounted the stair to his friend's painting room at the top of the mill. Fransoo's buxom wife came after him, laughing.

The painter, nearly naked, was busy with a panorama landscape in the half-lighted room with its walls in shadow. Pallieter put down the pot of honey and went straight to one of the airholes and put his head out. Oh, what light and air! And everywhere, all round was corn, all about the villages, the houses, round the convent woods, the meadows, and along the river banks! The land was golden with corn and the little men working in it looked no better than black ants.

This was the sacred labor of the Corn! As far as eyes could stretch, the scythes were reaping and windmills were turning like this one that swept its creaking sails just in front of his face. "Hurrah! this was all to make bread! the manna that the kind earth yields!

And above all the great sun spread its light out into eternity.

"Here," shouted Pallieter to Fransoo and his wife, who were already tasting the honey, "look at the world! She's giving birth, she gives suck. Let's rejoice! Let's

go among the corn and kiss the earth and bow down to the ground!"

They went downstairs and drank a glass of red wine with the miller, Leonie. Fransoo's wife gave Pallieter a bunch of saffron yellow roses in return for his honey; he shut his eyes and gulped up their delicious scent.

Then Pallieter and Fransoo went off to carry the other pot of honey to the poorhouse; they each took a handle and they walked through the cornfields. It was ripe already; the heavy ears were bending, looking blue and reddish on the under side. It was being cut; here and there a group of men and noisy girls binding, sometimes a man reaping alone. Some wide patches were already shorn, with rows of handsome sheaves on them. The fierce sunlight blazed down and absorbed everything—the corn, the trees and the harvest folk bending over their work; you could see the heat trilling above it all like water.

Pallieter and Fransoo had come to the end of their talk; they marched on together in the dust that their feet threw out in front of them; the only sound was their breathing, the swish of an ear of corn against their faces, and the buzzing of the bees round the honey pot.

They had got on some way. Pallieter's throat was dry as dust and he had a tremendous thirst for beer; but they were far in the country and not even the poorest sort of inn was in sight; there wasn't a drop of moisture left in his mouth.

In about another mile he saw a brewer's cart rumbling out of a sandy road and he shouted, "Hurrah!"

"What is it?" asked Fransoo, startled.

"We're a-dying o' thirst, and yonder's beer!" cried Pallieter. "Let's get a drink."

They walked across the cornfield to the cart.

"Hi, there!" called out Pallieter to the fat driver. "Let us a barrel o' beer. W'ere done for!"

"It's all ordered," shouted the man, driving on.

"Come on now, I'll give 'ee double pay," Pallieter called back.

"Well, then," said the man and pulled his horse up.

"Take the smallest barrel o' bock, then 'ee can drink right away. Are ye havin' a party?" he queried.

"That's it," cried Fransoo, and Pallieter lifted a barrel off the cart and paid for it.

The man drove off, and while Fransoo carried the honey, Pallieter rolled the barrel along with his foot.

"How can we get at it to drink?" asked Fransoo. "We've neither tap nor mugs."

Pallieter scratched his head at this. "A tap's naught, but where shall we get a mug?"

They stood still thinking and looked at the honey pot. If only that were empty—"Come on," said Fransoo, "let's go fetch a mug at one of the farms."

"Then on again!" and they rolled the barrel along the dusty road. They reached a cornfield half reaped and over on the shady side sat the reapers and binders, drinking their four-o'clock coffee. Pallieter was overjoyed at the sight of them and shouted out, waving his arms:

"Here, men, leave yer coffee! Here! Fresh beer! If ye bring mugs ye can all drink yer fill."

They all came directly with their coffee mugs, pushing to get nearest to the barrel. Pallieter cut the cork out with his pruning knife and the beer spouted out like a fountain. The mugs were held under and emptied greedily. A quickly made bung was cut out of a stick of wood and so it could be drunk at leisure and nothing lost.

They seated themselves round the cask, and Pallieter drank as much as he could out of a large basin with a red parrot on it. There was no end to their thirst; the beer flowed on and they drank and laughed till the sweat poured off their foreheads.

"Now a bit of music and 'twould be as good as a fair!" laughed one of the girls.

"Come along, Adrian!" some of them called out to a thin overgrown youth. "Fetch a cornet; then we can have a dance."

"Yes, yes," they cried eagerly. "We ha' time enough. Hurry up! Make haste!"

The boy went off willingly, while the girls giggled and talked nonsense together, quite excited.

The drinking went on all the time. An old man was tapster. The youth soon came back from the farm with his brother and a brass cornet with patches of green on it. He first drank a mug of the good yellow beer and then began to play a slow waltz, standing up stiff and straight. The notes sounded very strange and in the cornfields re-echoed to some distance. In a moment they

were all dancing, except the old man, who kept drawing beer for himself. Every young man seized a girl, and the men that were left over danced with one another. Fransoo danced with a short humpbacked peasant. But Pallieter got the flower of the flock—a plump slip of a girl with bare arms and legs and a rosy face all freckled; her eyes had a sly look, like those of a cat.

He pressed her soft body close to his during the dance; he could feel its warmth through her thin dress, and squeezed her hips till she squealed with laughter.

The dance was finished and they sat down on the grass by the others round the beer barrel. They were all panting and out of breath.

When they had all had a taste of the good beer again, Pallieter called out, "Come on, let's have another dance!"

It was a polka this time; he took the same girl and he danced wildly, he held her closely, then danced out of the circle, tripped her so that they both fell down and he fell on her soft body, and felt the laughter shaking her while he seized a hundred kisses from her white neck and round cheeks. They got on their feet again awkwardly. There seemed to be no end to her laughing. It made them all laugh so much that they stopped drinking. But then a horn was blown some distance off; it was the sign that the rest was over; they took up their scythes and rakes reluctantly and set to work again.

They shouted some joking remarks to Pallieter and Fransoo, who started cheerfully off again, leaving the cask behind them.

The two friends walked along, chatting together, but the almshouse was still far off and Fransoo wanted to rest a bit; he was tired and perspiring, so he dropped his heavy body on to the grass near a brook, shut his eyes, and was soon asleep and snoring like a hog. Pallieter sat down near him, lighted a pipe, and stared at the corn and the mounting larks; lighted another pipe, and, as Fransoo didn't move, he too fell asleep. The pot of honey was there between them in a hovering swarm of insects. There they lay asleep and above them, behind the huge oak tree, the atmosphere was quivering with the heat.

When Pallieter awoke, the pot was overturned and the sun was sinking into a streak of silver cloud. Fransoo woke up soon after and said, yawning, "That's done me a power o' good!"

They laughed over the spilled honey and then were silent because of the beauty of the evening.

The light faded magnificently, the whole sky looked iridescent, like a pearly ocean shell. They stood looking while the evening crept up and spread over the corn, laying a crimson glow on each ear. From near fields came the scent of hay, and the mist from the brooks drifted across the dry roads like golden dust.

They went home. "To-morrow I'll take another pot of honey to the almshouse," said Pallieter.

Fransoo turned off to his mill; Pallieter toward the river.

On the way he met a child carrying a sack of flour home on a wheelbarrow. He gave her the honey pot and, too shy to say anything, she hurried on.

Then he met a cart loaded with corn; on the top of it sat a buxom woman giving her child the breast.

The day was gone and the silver sickle of the moon cut sharp into a greenish sky. Two huge black oxen loomed immense against the light, still plowing the dark ground, the farmer trudging behind them. A bluish light just caught their black bodies and the skin on their backs ridged up and down in thick folds as they moved. They tossed their heads to and fro and their nostrils snorted steam.

The farmer kept on at his work and turned up another furrow. His plow glittered ghastly white, while the huge black oxen pulled slowly through the soil which fell open damp and shiny, yielding a wholesome smell and something of a thin vapor.

The sky overhead grew darker, the moon's crescent sharper, and one star opened its eye.

Pallieter's eyes followed the toiling beasts as they disappeared. They had touched his heart, and as he stepped into the boat one of them lowed through the night and it made him shiver.

The day was over, it was dark, but the water was still quite light and hay floated in its stream.

This wonderful peace was resonant with the voices of

reapers and binders singing on their way home. Pallieter's eyes felt the smart of tears as he exclaimed: "Nay! The great god Pan is not yet dead! That's not true! To-day I've seen his horns!"

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

A PLEASANT SURPRISE

T was a hot Sunday morning and Beiaard, the white mare, was swimming in the river; she played like a child, neighing and splashing till the green water quivered with broken silver and scattered sunlight.

Pallieter watched her, delighted, and at last he jumped, dressed as he was, into the water, swam up to her and climbed on to her broad back. There he sat as on a bed, left his arms loose and let Beiaard go her own way. Swimming and riding in this way, he looked out over the landscape that lay soaked in fierce sunlight, vibrating with heat. Rows of yellow sheaves stretched away on all sides and nothing was in motion but a single wagtail; no human being was in sight.

A scene of absolute peace.

Then suddenly the hot silence was broken by the great bells of the convent, their loud peal hummed out to the warm air. Charlot came out of the garden, dressed in her best—shining black satin with dull spots, large leg-o'-mutton sleeves and wide skirt; her new

round black bonnet had a bunch of stiff feathers, tipped with bright yellow balls. On her arm she carried a little green bucket, red inside, with pears, plums, and currant buns in it, and a brown beer bottle stuck out of it. She looked very happy and shouted to him:

"Hello, my lad! I'm goin'! Remember me to Marieke and say I'll be there on Sunday! I'll put up many a prayer for 'ee, that you may live happy together!"

"What for?" called out Pallieter. "I make no account of happiness that ye can get for me, I'll make it for meself!"

"I'll pray for 'ee all the same," she called back, snappishly, "and pray as much as I like!"

With this she turned quickly away and walked off to the church without looking round; she was to join the procession that was going on foot to Our Lady of Scherpenheuvel.

She was looked on quite as a heroine, for this would be the twenty-fifth time one after the other that she had made the famous pilgrimage; and on that account she was to enjoy the great favor of having the miraculous image placed on her head. Her face was all smiles and her heart jumped with joy.

Pallieter said to Beiaard, "Now we're off to see Marieke, but let's first have summat to eat."

He dropped off the horse's back and swam to the bank. The water streamed out of his breeches as if he were a pump; he went through the garden, but came to a stand at the sight and smell of the roses. There were

hundreds of them big as your fist, unfolding and bursting open; like snow, like red wine, like the flush of dawn and like saffron washed in milk. And who could count the pansies, dark velvet or the tricolor elfish faces that lay about in rich carpets? Around the little hill on which the windmill stood, bright yellow marigolds dazzled the eye and the little fountain stood up out of a thick bed of geraniums, spouting out its plume of pearly drops. Over there the Japanese grass, like colored fireworks, and then the light-yellow iris flowers, and above all and never-to-be-forgotten, overspreading and overwhelming them all, the luxuriant red and orange nasturtiums in thick festoons against the white wall and twisted round the fruit trees. Why, they were like flames flashing up out of the ground!

Everywhere the same ardent outburst of beautiful life. It was almost too good for humankind; and the intoxicating scents made a human soul faint with delight! But there such pleasure ended.

It was more than Pallieter could bear, and he muttered, bitterly;

"None but a fool would long after heaven when he can have glory like this!"

He went in to have something to eat and came back with his bagpipes under his arm; this was the instrument he liked best to express his feelings with.

He swam across, mounted the mare, and rode at a foot pace across the dry stubble fields. The sun dried his clothes while he played his pipes and sang his songs, thinking of his Marieke, the simplest one first.

The rumbling sounds rose up all round him and many a peasant came to his door to listen.

A stork flew up noisily in front of him out of the ditch. "Peter!" called out Pallieter. The large bird knew him at once and came flying just overhead in large circles. His red legs hung loosely down and his black-and-white wings looked newly washed, shining in the sunlight. Now and then the great bird swooped forward, leaned over to one side and drooped one wing, then mounted and let himself drift slowly down again without a flutter. He played about in the air, keeping pace with the horse.

The windmills stood motionless and by the roadside lay an upturned plow. The fields were at rest. Along the narrow lanes peasants in their blue blouses and white-capped women were walking to the little parish church whose bells were ringing; on the road in the distance the flash of a bicycle could now and then be seen.

The bagpipe music hovered over the peaceful fields like a swarm of bees that had learned to sing. He went past laden orchards where the trees sent out a rich odor

of apples. Some of them were bent down with their load of red and green and had to be propped up. Tall pear trees were brown with the many sorts of fruit. His heart melted at the sight and he said to the sun: "Sunlight, do your work and ripen the sweet harvest for the day when my soul shall have its holy-day!"

He had some beer at an inn and Beiaard got an armful of hay. The pleasant smell of Sunday soup came in from the kitchen. Pallieter asked for a plateful, and had it standing up just inside; Peter, the stork, who had flown all the way with him, came and stood in the doorway, begging! Pallieter gave him some pieces of meat and he flew up into the warm blue air and let himself float on it. Pallieter stood watching him at the door, with the young innkeeper's wife, laughing heartily.

He went indoors again, drank another glass of beer and gave one to Beiaard. As the maidservant bent down to pick up a cent he saw her fine brown neck and smacked a wet kiss on it. The girl turned to box his ears, but he was already on horseback, waving his whip and laughing at her.

The dust rose in clouds from the dry roads. The sunlight shone like silver on the horse's back and each tree they passed made a blue shadow over it.

Dogs lay asleep by their kennels and the crows of cocks followed one another from the different farms.

It was now noon and the deserted fields seemed to tremble under the weight of heat, and not a cloud was to be seen in the clear blue sky. From away in the distance came the dull rumble of drums.

He came to a water mill. The huge wheel was turning slowly by the weight of water that swirled and broke open like boiling silver and rushed off foaming down the wide brook. How cool it was, the fresh smell of water and the shady trees about the house! He dismounted, and he and his horse took a drink. Then he lay flat down in the grass to smoke a pipe and look about him while Beiaard snuffled about for clover. The light on the fields seemed twice as bright seen from under the wide shade of the trees, and the only sound was the chirp of grasshoppers and the rushing water Not a bird, not a leaf moved.

Round the lonely house with a walnut tree beside it, cows lay ruminating and a foal stood at the gate with drooping head.

A pigeon came out of the dovecote and, after strutting about, went in again; one of the glazed roof-tiles glittered as if it was a bit of broken sunshine.

The drum still rumbled in the distance, now nearer, then silent; then there was, far off, concertina music and hum of voices singing.

"Why, dang it! that's the procession!" cried Pallieter. He jumped on his horse and trotted off in that direction. He reached the white highroad all in a sweat, and in

front of him was a stretch of bare field, and high above the horizon a yellow balloon floated in the hot blue atmosphere.

Pallieter looked down the road, and yonder, in a cloud of shimmering dust, the procession was coming. He went to meet it.

Quite a thousand people, all muttered "Ave Maria's," as the music stopped that headed the procession with crucifix, priests in vestments, and red-coated acolytes. A dull drumming seemed to rise from the ground. All the people, men, women, peasants, nuns, and children, were white with dust kicked up in front of their weary feet. Their red faces ran with blackened perspiration, and many had tied their handkerchiefs, soaked in holy water, round their heads. Some of them just let it drip, and licked off the drops with their tongue.

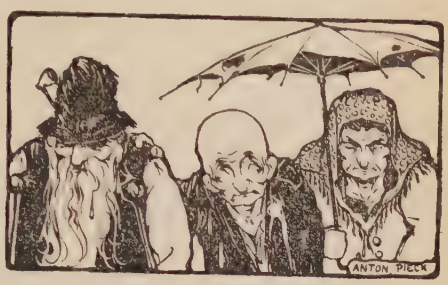
The men had taken off their coats and pulled off their collars, and the women had loosened the necks of their bodices. Some of them drank out of their warm beer-bottles and kept spitting, others crouched on the ground to get a drink from the roadside brook.

The most persevering and pious were in the front and kept their prayers going; the devotion gradually diminished and idle chatter could be heard in the rear. Those who could not keep up with the crowd walked at the side of the road in the soft sand in a cloud of dust, or they waited for the two old yellow omnibuses that came wobbling on behind.

The procession was all out of order. An unshaven young loafer walked in the shade of a nun's parasol, and

a dirty woman with a miserable wailing child side by side with one of the well-to-do citizens.

A haggard youth, half dead and yellow-faced, was carried in a wheelbarrow, and behind him came men on crutches, women with sick and crying children, and a blind man.



What a sight it was, this thousands of people on foot on this hot summer day, with their dust-laden clothes, screaming children, chattering voices, their tired dragging feet, and the faint, sickly odor of sweating bodies! It was something extraordinary, queer as a dream.

In this way, beneath this immense sky, empty but for one yellow balloon, they still had four hours' walk to go through the country smoldering like a baker's oven, only to kneel at last before the small black, most miraculous image of Our Lady of Scherpenheuvel.

"Well, well!" exclaimed Pallieter, so touched that tears stood in his eyes as he looked at the swaying crowd of people full of faith and zeal.

All at once he saw Charlot, smiling cheerfully at him, in the midst of the nuns and novices, and then his enthusiasm was damped; then he remembered suddenly all the people she had told him about and why they were going with it.

Among others, the wife of a doctor, so that his practice might increase; the landlord of the "Brass Elephant," so that his wife, now pregnant, might bear him a healthy son; Arnold v. Sichem, clockmaker, that his second son might be disqualified for military service, and his other son, who was already a noncommissioned officer, might become lieutenant, for the father wanted the elder to take up the business; farmers, who wanted rain for the potatoes; and young students, who were going to have an inauguration, that it might not rain; etc.

These were only some that he knew about, and what about the others? And Pallieter yelled out at a lean-looking nun, "Ye pickled saint!"

The novice did not raise her eyes, but went pale as a sheet. When they had all passed he muttered. "Where are those who pray as Ruysbroek bade them?" and he quoted:

"This only is to understand God truly—to worship and to love him—not for our own gain—not for our aggrandizement or for our salvation—or for what might be given unto us—but only for his own sake—and for his everlasting glory shall we love him—this only is perfect love—for in this way can we be one with God—and live in him as he in us."

"He who prays otherwise," he added, "is like a child in leading strings." Then he rode on by the bridle paths past villages and hamlets, and after awhile he saw the blue tower of Marieke's village rising above the trees.

His heart began to beat and he urged the horse's pace.

Yonder lay her home, on the other side of the village, and so as to give her a surprise and announce himself he began to play his pipes and rode up the path to the little white house. A peasant came and looked over the hedge and two little tots of children ran gaping after the music on horseback—but Marieke's home was shut up.

Pallieter dismounted and went to look down the side garden. There he found Uncle Harry asleep on a chair against the shady wall, and no other sign of life.

He woke up the farmer.

"What's come of my sweetheart?"

"Hi! Bin ye there?" said the farmer, yawning and stretching himself. "Er's gone wi' her cousins as be staying here a bit, a-walking up on the moor. Now let's have a drink."

"Nay," called out Pallieter. "I be all agog to see Marieke; I'll go seek her and come back ag'in." And off he went.

He rode along side lanes where everything was hot and empty, then beside a fir wood, then over open ground where patches of heather and yellow juniper bushes grew, and then through a long wood of fir trees which led with one turn of the path right on the moor in all its glory of purple bloom. An endless stretch of country like a wide sea spreading out purple as sunset, a purple that was set afire by the sun, while high up over

it arched the blue firmament, all silent and soundless; only for the hum and buzz of bees.

Pallieter came to a stand, enchanted at the sight of it. His heart seemed to open and lay bare to the palpitating life of the earth and became conscious of the soul of its being. He felt himself as a giant, earth's equal, and he murmured, "A man's soul is no trifle, after all!"

He rode on and could hardly believe his eyes. The purple! What a color! He could see no end to this royal purple!

Not a living creature to be seen on the whole moorland. He rode on all the same, and soon a few birch trees caught his eyes and the glitter of a silver pool beside them. There is no resisting water, so he set off toward it and, behold! suddenly twelve herons flew up from the water's edge, fluttering against one another, gray and white, with drooping red legs, a real Japanese picture; then along the silvery edge of the pool he could see three naked creatures playing in the water. He stood up in his stirrups and looked out ahead.

Yes! they were three naked creatures, jumping in the water, running out again, and splashing at one another.

Pallieter flushed, and said delightedly: "Why, 'tis Marieke with her cousins! Wait a bit!"

Oh, how glad he was! It made him nearly crazy. What a surprise! He dropped into the saddle again and rode forward like an arrow from the bow.

Again he looked. Yes, they were girls he could see by their shapes. On he rushed, but a three-fold cry of surprise and three naked girls ran away. One turned back to get her clothes, which she dropped again and ran on more quickly.

As soon as the galloping Pallieter could distinguish Marieke, he shouted to her: Marieke! Marieke!"

But she ran on as hard as she could, fell down, and caught up to the others. He came nearer. He heard their frightened, laughing shrieks and cries, and looked admiringly at their pretty rosy bodies.

The two fair-haired girls turned off in another direction and Marieke was left alone. Pallieter crossed her path; he could see her soft bosom panting and drew in to relish the sight of her. What a vision! Her lithe hips, the rosy skin still wet and shiny, and her hair streaming like a veil behind her!

"Oh, Marieke!" he cried out, but she shrank back, trembling. "Let me, please let me get my clothes!"

But he was too wild to take any notice. How lovely to

look at the fair body of his darling, the girl to whom his whole soul clung, there among the purple heather!

She stood still now, quite tired, crouching as to avoid a danger, her hands clasped in front of her tight-pressed thighs, and, red with shame, looked beseechingly up at him. "Do let me put my clothes on!"

"Ye are so sweet to look at, my dear." He bent down and lifted her up on his horse, thrilling with devotion at being able to touch the lovely bare body. He kissed her over and over again, but she kept her eyes shut, did not look up, with hands still tight pressed on her limbs, while tears rushed into her eyes.

"What, tears?" he said. "Tears? Why, then we'll fetch the clothes." And he turned the horse's head.

Then she relaxed and looked up at him with grateful, happy eyes. He kissed her lingeringly and she threw her soft arms round his neck and let her head rest against his shoulders.

Later on all three girls were mounted on the horse, and Pallieter went on in front, playing his jews'-harp. They were all singing.

They sat down to fried ham, farm bread, and delicious coffee. Nothing was said to the parents about the bathing, but the wedding day was fixed and that was to be September 21st, the richest month of the year, glory of earth's life!

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

RAIN

THE next day, after a furious thunderstorm in the night, the rain came pouring down. It came in thick, slanting streaks that hit fiercely on the ground like swords.

The horizon was shut off by blue curtains of rain that swept one after another over the ground.

Pallieter sat smoking his pipe under the cart shed, listening to the rain as if it were a tale from some old book. It was an invigorating change after the furnace-like heat, and wakened fresh green out of the soil. The water rushed furiously along the roof into the gutters and made them overflow, splashing and gurgling and darting hollows into the ground. It banged on the pails and spluttered into the water butts; it swished over the trees and rattled drops into the river.

The whole land seemed to quench its thirst with sighs of relief. The stable was wide open and the dung heap steamed. And Pallieter sat on the handle of a wheelbarrow, watching the big raindrops falling on the

roof as they danced up again like marionettes and dissolved in bubbles.

The rain dropped into his heart and made it swell with contentment; he looked into the blue distance, the swollen river, the dripping garden that was sending out a delicious scent of roses; he watched the blue smoke of his pipe vanish into the rain and an intimate sense of well-being came over him, something he must find expression for, too great and beautiful to waste. He wanted to get the rain into the very bottom of his heart.

He jumped into the boat, the old boat that lay there idly dreaming, and, standing up, punted up against the stream.

The rain was still splashing into the river in monotonous streams. The rushing water fascinated him and on he went, wet to the skin, pushing and punting so powerfully that the water splashed up over the boat while he sang aloud.

What a benediction it was, all that luxury of moisture splashed down on the earth with such careless bounty, the gift of a giant! The trees could not absorb the mass of rain, the grass lay flat, and the water ran in foaming rivulets to the lower ground. It was an unmitigated pleasure to feel all the weight of water on his body. It soaked him through, but he kept on singing.

"O Lord, Thou crownest the year with thy goodness and Thy paths drop fatness." He raised his head and let the rain beat on his face and make it red, and soak into his chest and shoulders.

"O rain, wrap me round with thy veils, thou sister of the sun!"

On and on he pushed up the flowing river, through the soaking fields and punted along, looking out over the wet country, singing:

"Down it comes a-pouring,
The earth is green again!
And folks look out o' windows
To bless the welcome rain."

Nowhere in that grand water panorama was there sign of a human being, except one fisherman huddled in a leather overcoat, stockstill, with his eyes glued to his little red float.

Troops of swallows sat along the water's edge; the cows in the meadows were moving up and down, their warm bodies steaming. A cowherd was whistling by a shed. The tilled fields were green and rejoicing and wholesome odors steamed out of the ground.

It was a delight to Pallieter to feel himself swinging with the rush of rain, and he pushed the boat along vigorously. God knows where he might have got to!

But at the ferry, where the highroad crosses the Nethe, someone called him by name. There was Fransoo looking out of a miller's cart, shouting and waving to him. Pallieter called back, and the fat fellow came trotting and chuckling through the downpour. He stepped into the boat and sat down, and they went on.

"The rain makes me wet," sang out Pallieter.

"An' me dry," replied Fransoo.

"Then get into the cabin," cried Pallieter, and Fransoo wriggled through the opening and stuck out his red face like a Bacchus.

Pallieter told him that the wedding was fixed for the twenty-first.

"We must have a drink on that. Let's get to an inn," said Fransoo.

"Well, nay," said Pallieter. "Let's drink at home."

"Then I mun light up." And Fransoo lit his pipe. "Let's be gone home. I told 'ee my throat was dry!" They began to turn the boat, when Fransoo shouted out, "Why yonder's the procession!"

Well, there it was, in the pouring rain, creeping along, black with umbrellas and sadly bedraggled. Shorter by half, scattered out of their rank, no music, no drums, no priests leading it, and at the end of it the yellow omnibuses and a carriage or two. In the very last the priests had taken refuge, and the omnibuses were crammed with people, and the tops in the pouring rain were crowded with people, with and without umbrellas; and there was Charlot, the heroine. Pallieter could see her with skirts packed up to her knees,

showing her stiff, thick legs; she was walking alone under her violet sunshade. He called to her. She came running and lamenting: "O my boy, get ye home quick and make the coffee. I'm near dead of hunger."

"Step in the boat."

"No, not me!" she called. "I'm doin' it all on foot, seven hour i' the rain, pourin' cats and dogs!" And she turned back to the road and took her place among the pilgrims. Pallieter and Fransoo laughed at her, but they turned back, all the same, Pallieter listening to the rain and Fransoo kept on smoking with one eye on the slate-blue landscape.

They changed their clothes when they got in. Fransoo ground the coffee and Pallieter put the table under the glass roof by the door, so that he could hear the raindrops pattering; under the roof against the house a gnarled vine had made its way and spread out a wealth of leaves and fruit. Such a load! More than a hundred bunches of grapes, big as pigeon eggs. It was a giant! It was the ornament of Pallieter's house, his finest piece of furniture. Some few days more and they would yield their freshness to his thirsty mouth! Oh, the joy of it! Wine that maketh glad the heart of man and rejoiceth his soul.

It was a sturdy, luxuriant tree, magnificent indeed when the sun shone on it lighting up the great leaves and making a splendid golden frame round the purple clusters.

The delicious smell of coffee filled the room, and when the meal was set out, cheese, cake, and apple jam, Char-

lot came home, dripping like a sieve, grumbling loudly. She dropped on to a chair and began to wail over her best dress that was all spoiled, only good enough for the dog to sleep on!

"Say no more about it," said Pallieter. "How did the procession get on?"

"Well! Well! what a downpour!" she went on. "Most of 'em are waitin' till it's over. The band wouldn't come back wi' us and went off by train. Some o' the wimmin was a-fighting to get in the omnibuses. Dear, dear! me clothes hang about me like lead. Walkin' with the rain streaming on ye seven hours long! Oh my! Oh my!"

She went off to change and came back in her workaday clothes.

"Let's have a sight of what ye brought along."

She fetched her little bucket, untied the wet handkerchief off it, chattering all the time, and took out a glass globe with an image of the Virgin inside it.

"Do 'ee look at this," she cried. "Look! It snows," and she turned the globe round and shook it and a shower of white powder fell round the image.

"That's not snow—sawdust!" said Pallieter.

"Hold yer tongue," threatened Charlot, "or ye'll set eyes on none of it! And look at this, you young rascal. Mr. Fransoo, look at this." And she opened a cardboard box and took out a shiny brass thing; it was a bell, a figure of the Virgin lying at the top of it. Charlot pressed her finger on to the face of the image, so that it flew feet upward and then clashed down on to the metal and rang like a church bell.

"Ye put that on the table; ring it an' ye need me."

"Ay," said Pallieter, "an ye'll think as Holy Mother calls 'ee!"

"Stop that!" she said. "Now here's a Madonna as ye'll see in the dark. Come and look!" And she put a plaster figure of the Virgin in the cupboard and told them to look through the keyhole. They both looked, and, true, the little image, smeared with phosphorus, shone green in the dark.

"Ain't it fine?" cried Charlot. "Enough to make 'ee afeard by night, eh?"

"Well, they do make queer things nowadays, don't they, man?"

"Ay," said Pallieter. "When a gal can't play wi' dolls any more, she'll play wi' the Holy Virgin."

At this, with one sweep Charlot whipped all the things off the table and took them off to her room, calling out:

"There, now ye'll get naught an' ye sha'n't have another look at anything."

Pallieter and Fransoo sat down to eat; then Charlot came to the table, cross and sulky, but she came round during the meal and began to chatter about Marieke!

The thought of Marieke warmed Pallieter's heart; he had the table cleared and got out wine to drink to her health.

Under the vine that would soon yield wine they drank the ruddy liquid out of crystal beakers that rang a clear tinkle when touched.

Fransoo reveled in the good wine, emptied his glass as soon as it was filled, poured it down like water. Charlot

drank sweet white wine and had a bottle to herself. Pallieter drank as much as Fransoo and the two went on toasting and drinking and talking about Marieke till they had drunk quite four and a half bottles, smoking a cigar at the same time, and soon their eyes began to swim and their talk stammered. Charlot went out shopping, and then they each drank another bottle of old red wine.

The evening came on and Pallieter said:

"Come on, let's go and tell the priest!" They went stumbling and swaying, one behind the other, through the rain puddles, laughing, both of them, without knowing what for. They found the priest still busy in his greenhouse among the cactuses. The good man had a collection of the rarest plants of this sort, to which he gave a good deal of his time and liked to talk about them.

They told him the wedding was fixed, and he fetched up three bottles from behind the beer barrel. Candles were lighted and the priest would have played them some Beethoven on his 'cello, but they didn't seem to want any music.

Pallieter and Fransoo sat there, both quite drunk, and still went on drinking. Pallieter began to sing, mumbling his words, then to talk, and forgot what he was saying. Fransoo sat laughing all the time without stopping. Then he called out:

"Come on! Now we'll go to the mill an' 'ave a drink! Come on, Pallieter. Come on, Father."

But the priest still had his offices to recite and could not go with them, so Pallieter and Fransoo crossed the

convent yard, swaying from side to side. Pallieter broke a pane of glass and there was a loud smash through the silence of the night.

They crossed the road arm in arm, singing at the top of their voices, stumbling along through the rain that was still pouring down . . . and when Pallieter awoke the next morning in Fransoo's mill and saw the mighty clouds on the horizon, he called out: "O earth that hath a thousand breasts, when canst thou satisfy me? Why, never, never."

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE HORN OF PLENTY

EPTEMBER came at last, the cool clear month that hangs blue incense in the trees.

Very mild and still it was that afternoon in the fields where many of the peasants were getting up their potatoes. Now and then a triangle of wild geese swept through the pale sunlight and small white tufts of cloud hung high in the eastern sky.

And behold! on the river, just by Pallieter's house, a newly painted boat was moored. Its shiny bulging sides lay high out of the water; it was painted bright green and white, with here and there yellow flourishes or a red star; the white sails hung loose from the mast and up in the top fluttered a small red flag.

This was the gay-colored boat in which Pallieter was going for his wedding tour. Its hold was to be filled with precious fruit, rich bounty of the year, and it was to be their only food.

Never had there been so rich and plenteous a harvest! It was the same all over the world: a vision of splendid color, the trees bent under the weight.

Oh, richest gift of Nature, her most sacred favor that has sucked up and absorbed the soul and blood of the earth and poured itself out in treasures to mankind!

The promise of the rosy-white May had been gloriously fulfilled; every blossom of early spring seemed to have given fruit.

The delicate fragrant vision of whiteness which had lightly veiled the trees had now become a rich and splendid carpet of heavy apples, pears, apricots, melons, nuts, golden, crimson and purple, a very dream!

The gardens were a paradise, with no forbidden fruit, where all the wealth and bounty of life hung ready to hand, rich in color and wholesome sweetness. What a blessing! This was something to pray and praise for!

Pallieter was wild with joy at this time. Quite off his head and gay as any blackbird.

"The earth is dropping her jewels!"

He was in his stocking feet and wore one of Charlot's blue cotton aprons; his red socks made bright spots in the gray-green of the orchard.

Everything was gathered and ready to be loaded on to the boat, for to-day Pallieter was to start, and get there to-morrow to be married.

He dropped out of the tree, all green with moss, his mouth full of pear, and called out to Charlot, who was knocking down walnuts with a sickle:

"Make haste!"

But Charlot went on scratching like the devil at St. Dunstan, so that the branches broke off, leaves flew in

all directions, and the loosened nuts rapped on to the ground like raindrops.

The gathered apples were spread out on the bleaching-ground and it made your mouth water to see them lying in the golden sunshine.

"Apples as big as your fist, deep crimson, streaked with yellow; their soul is red," said Pallieter, admiringly. "Who 'u'd ever think that they're white as milk inside?" He took one up and polished it on his shirt sleeve till it shone like glass. "Pity to eat it up!" he murmured, as he looked at the empty core in his fingers. "Come now, Charlot," he called out again. "Let 'em bide. We ha' nuts now more than enough. Bring 'em all to the boat."

Charlot filled up a clothes basket with the apples and carried it creaking against her body; the red apples crimsoned her face like a sunset.

And it so happened that the priest was on the river bank, reciting his office, and he called out: "Hi, Charlot, bring some to me!"

Charlot tried to turn round, but she stumbled and fell on the ground, shrieking: "Jesus! Maria! my apples! my apples!" while all the rosy fruit rolled away in front of her.

The priest came up directly to help her pick them up,

and Pallieter stood a little way off, roaring with laughter till the place echoed.

The priest helped to carry on the basket.

Meanwhile Pallieter had loaded up the wheelbarrow with half the fruit, piling it up till they rolled off again. The sight of this wealth of fruit on the blue barrow amazed the priest. He clapped his hands and cried out:

"Why, look at this, just look at this! Solomon would have made a fine song about it!"

And that was surely true!

It was magnificent, a heap of the finest fruits piled up together; purple grapes with their sunburnt leaves, and among them and under them soft pink and maize-yellow velvet peaches, apples, green hazelnuts, walnuts, golden melons, bronze pears and fresh shiny brown chestnuts and medlars, all of them mixed up and set blazing with the glow of red apples!

Heaped up and flowing over in richness of color and spreading an odor good enough to heal the sick and make the birds crazy.

Life itself lay there, an offering for a god.

Loebas, the dog, pulled the heavy cart carefully to the boat, and Pallieter, Charlot, and the priest walked beside with joyful faces.

Such comfortable little rooms those were on the boat! White curtains and flowerpots at the little windows, through which one could see far over the fields.

There in the corner, under one of the round windows, was the bed, all nicely made up by Charlot, and she had

not forgotten to hang a little crucifix with a palm branch above it.

Charlot went back directly for more fruit and the priest took a chair, while Pallieter sat on a corner of the table.

They drank a glass of Schiedam and the priest said:

"What a good idea, now, to make your wedding tour in a boat!"

"Ay!" said Pallieter. "What could I have found better for us to get away from ye and Charlot, to be by ourselves and melt into each other's arms? Here's to the wedding boat!"

Charlot brought another load of fruit and the jews'-harp, concertina, tobacco, and other things; then they all had to leave the boat, because the river was rising and Pallieter had to get dressed.

Fransoo arrived about the same time, with his things done up in a handkerchief, and was shouting to be fetched across the river; he was to go with Pallieter to the wedding. Charlot and the priest were to come next day in the cart, drawn by Loebas.

Charlot fetched Fransoo across in the boat, and the painter told them that his wife would not be able to come, as one of the seven children was ailing with its teeth.

"We shall be able to manage it alone, eh?" he said.

The day ended in misty blue and evening came on mysterious and quiet, and the tide rose steadily.

"We're going to be wed!" shouted Pallieter as he unfurled the sail and pushed the boat off where it was caught by the stream and drifted gracefully on, clearly reflected in the water.

"We're sailing to Marieke," sang out Pallieter and Fransoo to Charlot and the priest, who stood watching them from the bank. The priest waved his handkerchief, and all at once Charlot darted forward and screamed out: "O my lad, my dear lad!" and then hid her face in her blue apron.

The two men sailed on toward the town. The smoke of the evening meal from the many chimneys rose straight up in the serene twilight which was still touched with sunset gold. Lamps were being lighted; they could hear the voices of children and the rumble of heavy carts on the cobblestones. Then they passed open fields where it was very quiet and night had fallen already on the trees. A mild warmth suffused the atmosphere. The fields were deserted but for the rumble of a cart, and the boat floated quietly along on the rising tide.

Evening came over the land in a veil of pure blue. A line of white mist hung just in front of the distant trees and over there were two smoldering red spots of fires burning on the empty potato fields. Now the mist spread itself out farther over the ground, shifting along the water like ghosts in a dream.

Wholesome smells came to them from the meadows,

and the odor of apples and melons penetrated up from the cabin.

A great peace had spread over everything, a sweet rest after heavy labor. Some belated bird gave a laugh in the far-off stillness.

The two men lay on deck, not talking as they smoked their pipes. To-morrow Marieke, the maiden, would come into this boat and bloom into a woman among the rich harvest of a bounteous year. How glorious! How exciting! How could he sit still? But Pallieter was scarcely thinking of that. The evening was so tender and so calm, overflowing with peace, that he too felt quiet and serene, and pure as a saint.

The wedding party was now in full swing. The table was laid all down the long shed, and it was quite full of folks, eating greedily, talking at the top of their voices, shouting and singing. It was a noise like a cattle fair, and above the clatter came the sound of a concertina or a shrill triangle.

Servants in their shirt sleeves were bringing the dishes of sausages and cabbage, ham and beans, steaming potatoes and jugs of ale, on wheelbarrows or doors that had been taken off their hinges.

The two doors at the ends of the shed were set open to get plenty of light, and there was a fine view right over the fields to the woods that stood in a thin mist spun golden with sunlight.

The gray plastered walls were brightly decorated with dark green of asparagus foliage and bright-colored paper

roses here and there. The place was blue already with tobacco smoke from the pipes and cigars. The sun crept far into the shed and brightened the color. Pallieter and Marieke, the young couple, sat at the middle of the table, and Marieke sat there like a doll, stiff and quiet in a straight plum-colored frock tight round the bust; a white veil fell round her shoulders and was fastened in her hair, with a little wreath of orange blossom stiffened with wax. She sat there demure as a nun, but fresh and radiant with happiness. Her cheeks were just a little more rosy than usual and the sun gilded the little curls of hair round her white forehead. She sat there in all the noise and clatter as if she did not belong to it, and when Pallieter, who sat next to her and was calmly eating his dinner, spoke to her, then her eyes fell and a warm flush spread over her face and a happy smile touched her lips. But when Uncle Henry, her father, went on talking to Pallieter about honey and manure, her eyes wandered round the table and she nodded pleasantly and rather shyly to some of the friends and relations. She hardly touched anything to eat, but a soft peach or a walnut from one of the many dishes of fruit on the table.

Pallieter watched her, sitting there in her lovely child-like simplicity; and his heart set off at a gallop. He wanted to be alone with her and began to get impatient.

"Come, shall we creep out of it together?"

But she said better wait a bit, she didn't like to go away and spoil the party. Then more dishes of food appeared, new songs were sung, and the glasses filled up.

So they sat on.

On a barrel, with a pot of beer beside him, sat a fellow with a squint, playing a concertina without stopping.

Fransoo couldn't take his eyes off this display of color

—all these peasants' faces who had hardly ever smelled anything but their native soil and taken their form and color from it.

"Each of 'em is worth his weight in gold," said Fransoo. It was a feast of color for a painter—the bright variegated shawls, the rich glitter of gold ornaments, and the frosty white of their lace caps and the pale fair hair of the young girls; the men's bright neckties and a dragoon in his light green uniform; and besides that there was black, black silk and black cotton that brought out the effect of the brilliant colors and the fruit on the table.

"Oh, oh, look at it, my good fellow," cried Fransoo to Pallieter. "Ye wouldn't find a better picture, not between here and China. 'Tis grand!" The sun kept creeping farther and farther and made the painting richer.

The priest's shorn pate shone out distinctly against the blue woody background, and Charlot was all in a sweat with good feeding and delight. Marieke's grandmother sat next to her, dressed in creaking black silk, and wore a straw hat with wide ribbons over her cap.

She sang her granddaughter's praises without ceasing, till at last tears stood in Charlot's eyes. They all sang songs and laughed and joked, and the beer began to get into their heads. They made such a noise that the concertina was hardly audible.

Pallieter began to itch with impatience. He wanted to be off with Marieke. She didn't dare to get up till he whispered close in her ear; then she stood up with a smile on her face and went away. At that very moment a farmer of about forty, more than a bit drunk, jumped up on a chair and began to sing:

"Three young drummers left the war behind them,
Three young drummers marching all the way—
Rub-dub-dub! A-rub-a-dub! A-rub-dub—
Marching all the way."

Every one joined in this, so that Marieke was able to slip away, almost unnoticed.

Pallieter went out on the other side and they met behind the house, where all the carts, that had brought the guests, stood waiting, and while Marieke ran up to her room to fetch her bundle of clothes that were ready, Pallieter harnessed Loebas to the blue dog-cart. They took their seats on the narrow bench and there was a "Gee up!" and the whole wedding party started off.

They had hardly gone a stone's throw when there was loud shouting from the farm, and at the back of the hedge in the road. All the wedding guests stood calling and cheering, waving their arms and their handkerchiefs. Some of them had mounted on tables and chairs.

They went through the villages at a good pace and came out into the open.

"On and on to the Nethe!" cried Pallieter. The quiet pine wood smelt of resin, and here and there a ray of sunlight lighted on some birch tree under the dark canopy of firs or a leaf floated gently to the ground.

Pallieter held his dear little wife with one arm and her gauzy veil streamed out behind with the quickness of their pace. She laid her head on his shoulder and kissed him and then burst into a joyful laugh. She was at her ease again, now she was alone with him whom she loved with her whole soul. They got jerked against each other and the sand flew up from the wheel in a cloud. Peasants stood still, laughing to look at them, called out jokingly after them, but they drove on without turning their heads, longing to be alone together at last.

Gradually they came to more solid ground, and after passing through one more thinly planted firwood they could see below them the clear shine of the river, and there lay the boat.

They drove quickly down the incline.

When they arrived there, the boy who had been looking after it was sent back to the party with a handful of money.

"Take the cart along wi' ye," said Pallieter. "Loebas 'll stay with us. He'll tell no tales. Now be off!"

Then Pallieter, Marieke, and Loebas went on board.

Marieke was going down to change her dress, but he called out to her, laughing:

"Not into the cabin yet, or we shall never get on deck again!"

So she sat down by the rudder on the water barrel and watched Pallieter unfurl the sails, that caught directly in the light breeze. Next Pallieter pushed the boat off from the shore and came and sat down beside her at the rudder, and away they floated slowly at about a walking pace.

"Now ye're my own at last!" cried Pallieter, showering kisses on her rosy mouth.

The boat drifted on through the fine country of Reyen. Clouds floated high in the blue air. There were cows in all the meadows and hills in the distance covered with pinewoods.

Marieke in her plum-colored dress nestled close into Pallieter's arm, while he steered with the other. Her veil was lifted sometimes by the breeze, which dropped round her rosy cheeks again, a mesh of sunlight.

A beautiful little virgin she seemed to him. And how happy she was! It shone in her eyes. The basket of fruit Pallieter had laid at her feet was left untouched.

The water and the meadows gave out odors. Here and there already a tree was turning yellow. The sun lit up the white sail, and high in the air triangles of cranes were flying south. Pallieter watched them, and then for the first time the longing seized him to go out into the wide world.

All this seemed so new and beautiful to them. They laughed with joy at it, but their hearts were growing heavy with the sweetness of love, love that overpowers the sense and arrests all the other forces of life. They began to forget all this pageant of beauty in the longing to be alone with each other.

They were greedy for each other. Their kisses were never enough; they couldn't get close enough together.

All the time they were floating onward, and evening gathered quickly in the sky.

Everything turned gray. The wind dropped out of the sails and a calm settled over it all.

They did not know this part of the country. Far, far away a little lamp was being lighted. But they never thought of moving.

The evening mists came creeping through the quietness and thickened as they watched them.

Suddenly they struck the bank and the boat stuck fast. That made Pallieter jump up. Marieke gave a sigh and Pallieter made the boat fast to a pollard willow. Some more light had appeared by this time.

"Come, let's go below now!" he said.

Then they lighted their own lamp, and when Marieke saw all that abundance of lovely fruit and the little white

bed all ready, then the color rushed into her face, her heart choked her, and her little head sank on to his breast.

And up above them the open hatch spread out light into the darkness, a sign of peace and wonderful happiness.

How delightful when they woke the next morning in their warm bed and the delicious smell of fruit around them! When they looked out of the little round window close to their heads and saw the meadows spread out in the bright sunlight and the green-covered sloping hills all round! They caught hold of each other and began to chatter like two children.

They came up on deck, eating fruit, and oh, what joy! Wind and sun!

There had been a shower in the night that made everything fresh and new.

A steady mild wind rolled over the landscape, the clouds had been hustled off, and the sun beamed brighter and richer on the green land, among little milk-white clouds.

The boat sailed now with wide-open sails and the wind swelled them out like pillows. It rushed forward through the silver, rippling water, the boards creaked, the little red flag fluttered. Loebas barked, but it could hardly be heard.

The mist clung against the chimneys of the solitary houses, and the sails of a white windmill on a hill were turning round briskly.

Marieke's skirts clung round her firm legs, showing the curves of her trim young figure. The smoke of Pallieter's pipe flew off with the wind. It was a piece of luck to be able to sail like this, and they both stood up on deck to feel the good wind push against them. So they went on and on, farther and farther along the beautiful Nethe that flowed within its dykes.

"Marieke," cried Pallieter, as he clasped his dear little wife to his heart and looked into her large, happy, eager eyes, "ye have made my life twice as big and twice as beautiful as it was! How ever can I thank God for that?"

She gave no answer, so he called out:

"Let us eat his fruit," and with both hands he pressed a bunch of grapes against her open mouth.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

THE MUSIC OF HORNS

OR days the autumn wind had been blowing steadily over the country, driving the mists and showers before it. For days the trees had stood with bowed heads and ruffled leaves, and the grass lay flat along the ground. Then the mists came and rotted the leaves and the cows began to low after their warm stables.

Marieke and Pallieter were keeping their youthful love-feast in their own house.

But at last there was mild open weather again and the sun, now low in the sky, showed lovely stretches of distance, and doors and windows were thrown open again.

Heavens! What a change had come over the landscape! The mighty green that had draped the trees for so many months was now golden red and brown! From the atmosphere, the fields, the brooks and the moss, from all things, great and small, there spread a marvelous peace, a clear stillness, a divine serenity.

The leaves fell and winter was on the threshold. The

glory had departed. Life had yielded up her treasures. Tired and exhausted, she would sink back into the earth to gather new strength for another year. Frogs, bats, birds, grasshoppers, all are subject to the same law. Reaction! It is the inhalation of life. Everywhere new lives have been born and have lived, and as life must always produce life, therefore it retains some of the many ready to receive new souls for the next year.

How can it be otherwise? From where else could the earth find forms to clothe its souls? It is a sphere and contains no more than its own substance.

Thus the forms that pass away, first create others. Everything in rotation passes into life, and one form is as beautiful as the other, for they all share the breath of life. How beauiful this is if one thinks of it! Yet, alas! we human creatures wish it otherwise.

It was very quiet here by the babbling little brooks under the tall yellow-leafed trees and the brown undergrowth. It was noon, no sound to be heard but the drop of a falling leaf.

Pallieter had a blue double bag over his shoulder, filled with rye meal, and was going home along the winding course of a brook. He was off his head with delight at the glorious autumn color and his mouth was stained with the juice of blackberries found as he went along, and once more he came to a standstill at sight of the marvelous beauty around him.

Behold! all those yellow leaves, all the yellow trees, were soaked with sunlight! The yellow masses that

absorbed the sun and held it glittering against the clear blue sky could not hold all the glory together, and let it fall to the ground and it seemed to set the whole tree alight. It was the same with every tree—each gave light and color to the other and all the trees together made a cloud of gold. Pallieter was lighted up by it. He went on, and every step on the dry leaves rustled through the stillness. They lay all about, thick and loose, like carpets, and gave out a pleasant smell. Pallieter liked the sound, and instead of lifting his feet he shuffled through the leaves, that made more noise, and the rustling made him dream. The leaves jumped, pushed, and fell on his shoes; he played with them, rushed along quickly, and then went more slowly till he made them sing a song, these dry yellow leaves—a song like the murmur of a far-off sea.

On he walked till he reached a bare hilly space full of autumn leaves and surrounded by tall, massive trees and thick bushes. Pallieter stood looking at it. Here the sun shone clear, and blazed with all its might on the bright-colored foliage with such force that the yellow poplar leaves were like liquid gold and the red of the beech trees like blood in flames.

A gorgeous vision of tone and color! A revelation of

the purest gold colors imaginable—amber-yellow, brown, red, copper, blood, fire, flame and golden gold! And the sunlight was woven into it, danced and swept it through and through till it became an apocalypse of divine tones of color. It made music of it.

It was quieter in this wide space. Nothing moved, the air was as dead as iron.

Suddenly Pallieter lifted his head and listened. The sound of many hunting horns in the distance! Their sound melted into the golden blaze of the trees! He stood to listen, and then went on rustling through the leaves and followed winding footpaths under the great trees into the open fields.

Bright sunshine everywhere, and yonder, across the river, shrouded in blue mist, were the immense convent woods. Autumn gossamer drifted through the air and there was a smell of old turnips in the ground.

Pallieter lay down flat on the grass, listening to the distant bark of dogs and the music of the horns from out the blue veiled woods. The sounds swayed to and fro, re-echoing till they were lost in the air.

A stag came running out of the woods, and farmers and peasants after him with rakes and pitchforks; but he was too quick for them and sprang away nobly, with antlers held back and forefeet bent, as we see on the old tapestries. Off he went across a flooded meadow and disappeared into other woods on the west.

The horns continued blowing in the distance, nearer, and then farther off, as the hunt moved about. He saw sheep grazing, the sun touching their ears to pink and

curling into their thick wool. On the edge of a brook sat their hunchbacked shepherd, playing cards, as a child might do, all alone, poor fellow!

"That way you're bound to win, but can you win against me?" said Pallieter. And he sat down on the grass, took up the dirty, crumpled cards, cut and dealt them. They started playing, and they swore and disputed and shouted as if their lives were at stake, drinking now and then at the brandy which the shepherd had in a flask in his pocket.

Then the hunchback limped off with his flock and the sun was setting in the west ablaze with broken streaks of crimson and gold on blue and purple clouds, spreading a glow over the whole world and turning the puddles along the road into bits of gold.

Pallieter went home down the lanes and took a kindly look at a young peasant couple who leaned whispering over the back of a white cow that was cropping the late clover. The sun made an orange halo round their figures and a swallow flew squeaking above their heads. After that he found a roadside inn where peasants and carters were playing cards.

"Hello!" they shouted from all sides as Pallieter came in. "Ye'll be setting yerself up in a castle now! Ye'll be as rich as the sea's deep! Send up a barrel o' old brown. Ye can well spare that much!"

Pallieter stared round at them amazed. "What's the meanin' o' this?"

"Do 'ee know naught of it?" they all shouted at once, and they told him that a railway was to be laid over the

Nethe and the river was to be canalized and his farm would be taken into it, and that another fort was to be built, and a new cemetery. This knocked him all of a heap.

"Damn! Then it's all up." And he kept on swearing. "Good-by to my good ground. I won't stay here if it'll be like that! Out I go! Then we'll fly off as birds do! World's big enough!" And Pallieter remembered the cranes he had seen on his wedding day, flying south, and how they had made him think of going into the world to seek another home.

"I look toward ye!" he said, and drank to them, threw his bag over his shoulder, and hurried home to tell it all to his dear Marieke.

Night was coming on. Eastward it was dark, and there was only one golden streak left in the west. Mists rose up from the ground with the smell of fallen leaves, and quiet had settled over the land; only the gray-yellow leaves cracked and rustled under Pallieter's feet. A cow lowed after its stable, a leaf fell on to his hand, and away in the dark convent woods came the note of one sad and solitary horn. It made his flesh creep and brought tears to his eyes; he felt the cold of winter shiver through the land and through his heart.

At home he talked it all over with Marieke in bed. She was glad about it, and they decided that when spring came and the earth was green again, they would go out into the world together.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

A WET, GRAY DAY

A COLD rain was falling through the thick mist that hid the world from sight.

The trees were shiny green, like a frog's back. Everything was wet. Those who came out of doors got wet to their skin.

The damp crept into the houses, dimmed the window-panes, and moistened the walls. The floor tiles oozed damp and the salt was clammy. The cobblestones were wet, the room was wet, everything was wet through. Through the mist came the coo of a solitary dove from a dark tree.

Nature had given up her last breath and all that was round her seemed deserted and done for.

The trees were quite bare and wretched to look at with their battered and twisted branches. The wild, angry, senseless wind had torn off all their leaves, hurled them through the air till some of them flew up like birds; others were drifted along the roads by thousands and soon rushed into a corner where they found no outlet and whirled round and round all the time, as if they were

crazy; and so the dance of leaves went on, ceaseless and monotonous, till the rain beat them down and let them rot.

The trees mourned like mothers for their leaves.

Just within the cart shed Marieke and Charlot stood, with sleeves turned up, at the steaming wash-tub, and Pallieter was on his knees, chopping wood.

The air was quite still. The women were not talking, there was no sound in the air but the hacking and cracking of the wood. You could not see across the river, it was so shrouded in mist; it had been white all night.

The trees in the garden stood there gray and sullen, like useless things.

A man with a black dog after him was loitering past the hedge like a ghost. He stopped and called out in a hoarse voice:

"Hi, Pallieter, is that yersel'?" And a fit of coughing came on.

When it was over, Pallieter called out; "Ay, 'tis me-self."

"Will 'ee set me across? Or I'll be forced to go a long way round."

"Where be 'ee goin' to, Piet?" called Pallieter.

"To convent woods to buy timber. There be good bargains. Will 'ee come?"

"I'll come along wi' ye! Wait a bit!"

He went to put on his coat.

"Ye'll be soon home?" asked Marieke. "I ha' good news for 'ee."

"Can't you tell it to Charlot?"

"Surely, but— Well, go along, and come back soon."

She colored up and pushed the brown curls off her forehead with her pretty arm.

"Ye can make sure I'll know it!" called out Charlot, angrily, "and I'll hear it long afore you, ye silly gomeril!" Then, coaxingly to Marieke: "'Tis true, ain't it lovey?"

"Ay," said Marieke, and went on washing.

"Do tell us, now," urged Charlot. "Tell us a bit of it."

Then Marieke told her.

"Is that for sure?" cried Charlot, delighted, and directly she insisted that Marieke must stop the washing, as it might do her harm.

"Pallieter 'll jump for joy an he knows that. Let me tell 'im, do 'ee now. I'll give 'im a start!"

Pallieter crossed the river with Piet and his dog, and they went on toward the convent woods. They kept to the winding footpath, for they could not find their way because of the mist. The trees appeared at intervals as if starting out of the ground all gray, and then disappeared suddenly.

The rain drops clung like seed pearls to Pallieter's coat and the ground was soaked to a greasy mud till over their boots.

They passed a meadow lying under water with three dismal pollard willows in it. The dog barked at a croaking raven that flew off suddenly into the mist. Pallieter

and the man talked about farming, and the black dog trotted obediently behind, sniffing the ground.

There was no stir in the air, not a breath of wind, and the rain fell silently.

Pallieter got warm and loosened his coat.

At last they came to the wood and trod on the soft leaf mold under the tall trees. The light grew dimmer.

These were the great convent woods.

Large, heavy raindrops drifted from the branches. As they went farther in they saw a group of people round a man who was shouting out numbers. The men stood there with wet noses and soaked with rain. Pallieter and his companion joined the group.

The man's squeaky nasal voice rose right up into the

lofty wet trees, standing there like mighty giants, looming taller through the mist that hung about them.

The auctioneer took them all to a beech tree, such a great fellow that three men couldn't stretch round him.

He spread out his noble branches far and wide and his crest was hidden in the mist, his foot was firmly planted, fast as a rock, with twisted gnarled roots clutching into the ground. A majestic tree! When Pallieter thought of this giant to be felled in a few days, he could not bear it, and cried out to the tree, "Ye shall grow!" and startled the auctioneer with shouting such a big offer, that he could hardly find breath to say, "Agreed!"

Now Pallieter was the possessor of a tree, and, Lord! what a tree! His like could scarce be found. It was only one tree, but it made him as happy as if a kingdom had been offered to him.

"My tree!" he said. "And when the others are cut down, ye can still stand there, I promise ye! Go on a-growing, make leaves, make nuts, grow as ye please, and hide the li'l' rabbits between yer mighty toes!"

He came to buy wood for the winter and he bought a whole tree, and with his pruning knife he wrote in the bark, the only writing he ever did, "Enjoy yer day."

Off he went alone through the silent wood, where big drops were still leaking out of the mist. He kept thinking of trees and of human beings and how, while he was tramping through the lonely wood, happy as a king because of a tree, there, outside of it, was the world full of pain and misery, and people, most of them sick and sad with sorrow, living only in the hope of death.

The thought of it crushed him, yet, alas! how could he help it? What was he himself but another human worm?

The earth revolves and he turns with it. There is but one difference, that is that he can enjov the turn of it.

And that's a thing that no one, however hard he tries, can give or share with another.

As he emerged from the wood he heard the weary tramp of many horses and the clinking of loose shoes along the highroad, and coming up out of the mist and shuffling against one another came a troop of about twenty worn-out horses.

They were limping along on crippled, swollen feet and their poor old heads drooped heavily on their long, skinny necks. Their joints stuck out as big as your fist and their ribs like barrel hoops. There were blind ones and wounded ones among them, and they all pressed together as if to support one another. A mass of misery it was! They were being driven to the slaughter house by two dirty fellows, never to know the relief of ending

their days in a good field of grass. They were almost like human creatures, and after a cruel death they were to serve as food.

"Where do they come from?" asked Pallieter.

"From Louvain," snarled the man.

It cut Pallieter to the heart. The other fellow was behind; with the handle of his whip he was hitting the last horse against the legs, and it was lame. He kept on hitting, just from habit.

This made Pallieter wild, and without a moment's thought he rushed at the man and hit him right in the face so that he fell backward. But the fellow was ready to fight and jumped up, cursing, and gave Pallieter a black eye; then Pallieter got him by the throat and they both rolled over in the mud. Then the first drover came along to help his companion, but Pallieter pulled him down to the ground, too, and sang out:

"Holka tolka! Dance the polka!
Swing yourself around!"

and he banged their two heads together hard. Both smelled strong of gin.

"An' if ye hit the poor beasts again, I'll eat both yer heads, I will! Brutes that ye are!" Pallieter walked off; the men shouted something after him, but made no step forward.

When he got home there was the good smell of freshly made coffee.

Fransoo was sitting by the blazing Mechlin stove, chatting to Marieke. Charlot was setting the table.

"Why, what's wrong wi' yer eye?" they all called out.

"Ran agin a tree," said Pallieter. "Give us coffee, for I'm famished."

But Charlot could not keep the good news to herself, and she came and whispered in his ear.

"What?" shouted Pallieter, filled with joy. "Is that true, Marieke?"

Marieke nodded and colored up to her eyes.

He jumped up, took her in his arms, and kissed her mouth till she gasped for breath.

"Currant bread!" he shouted. "Spice cakes and wine! Let's drink to our offspring! Call the priest, Charlot!"

As quick as quick Charlot put on another skirt and went off smiling to fetch the priest.

The good-hearted man wished Pallieter "Proviciat" [1] and tapped Marieke kindly on the cheek. He turned cheerfully and said: "Now, Pallieter, my boy, you won't want to go running round the world now there's a child coming. You must stay and live in our old Netheland!"

But Pallieter said: "'Tis only put off for a bit. We'll still go, after the child is born, and I'll do my best to take you with us!"

[1] In Flanders people congratulate one another with the word, "Proviciat!"

They drank good coffee and milk and ate currant bread, Dutch cheese, fried ham, and many other nice things. Then Charlot fetched out some very old wine "from the time of the child Jesus," she said. Cigars were lighted and they drew up round the cosy Mechlin stove. They talked about odd things, but most of the time there was a pleasant silence. As soon as she had washed up, Charlot came and sat with them, hoping to get a good laugh.

Marieke had Tybaert, the cat, purring on her lap.

They were wrapped in tobacco smoke and twilight came in on tiptoe. The rain was faintly audible against the windowpanes, through which nothing was visible because of the mist, and the light grew grayer and grayer. Faces became blurred; only the glow of the fire and the three cigars showed red in the soft gray twilight, and their few words mingled indistinctly with its softness.

The warmth helped to quiet and soothe them. At times there was a long silence when nothing was heard but the rattle of the rain on the window.

And in the consecrated stillness, with a voice like velvet, the priest recited verses by Gezelle. Nobody had spoken of Gezelle or uttered a remark about art, but still there was something that made it suitable at this moment, in keeping with the spirit of this evening. It came as naturally as a flower blooms. Slowly, clear, and quiet came the voice, with all the devotion of a great human heart:

"Sad and lonely, I
Sit and watch the sky
Where high above me stars do shine.
Dark is all I see,
There is no light for me,
Save their glitter so divine.

"O God, how weak and small
Is my soul, and all
Lost I lie in thy great night,
'Mid thy stars forlorn,
Like a child unborn
That shall never see the light!"

When it was finished no one spoke a word, not a breath; there was an impressive silence and expectation. Then the priest began again:

"O Song, O Song,
Thou easest pain
Thou makest me heart-whole again,
And free from my old sorrow,
O Song, sweet Song,
This aching smart
'Tis thou alone canst heal the blow!
And hope revives the wounded heart
If only thou wilt have it so!
O Song! O Song!
These bitter tears
That wet my cheeks, I know, I know,
At thy touch sadness disappears
And sweet as honey they will flow!
O Song! sweet Song!"

The last echo of "O Song, O Song" was uttered with an intense soberness of emotion, so quietly that it seemed to lose sound and vibrate on the heart. Then after a pause came that intensely mystic verse, "Joy"—"There come some days of joy in life"—and after this devout little poem there was silence.

This ended in a stifled sigh, and that was all.

The rain still pattered on the windows. Pallieter heaved a sigh and Marieke echoed it, Fransoo relighted his cigar, and that showed that they all had tears in their eyes—except Charlot, who had fallen asleep, leaning against the stove.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

A FINE WINTER DAY

ALLIETER came out of doors. The weather was as clear and fresh as if the spring had come back to earth. He fetched his hat, lighted a pipe, and went out to stretch his legs. The sky was a soft porcelain blue and there was a light breeze that swung and flapped the washing about in the gardens. It amused Pallieter to watch the garments being hurled about as if there really was life in them.

Here and there in the fields there was a peasant at work; a spade glistened and the wet grass looked bright green against the brown soil. The horizon was clear, but without sun; the red roofs of farms came into sight through the bare trees, and in the well-wooded distance on the south appeared the solid blue tower of Mechlin.

Pallieter rubbed his hands, snuffing up the odor of the earth that had been soaked with rain for days and days, now become solid again in the wholesome wind. The roads were dry and firm again. A cock crowed and pigeons were flying about.

"It's the right sort of weather!" he said, as, strolling

from one lane into another, he came upon the sound of organ-grinding. It sounded like glass piano bells or striking on cut-glass bottles.

Very clear and pleasant it sounded in this fine weather.

Pallieter was after it directly. It seemed to come from beyond the highroad, and he hurried on to see. Just off the road, near a clump of poplar trees, were two rows of workmen's houses, facing each other. When he came up to them there was not a creature to be seen, but two children playing with the mud.

While he stood looking he saw a thin-faced pregnant woman and a girl with red hair coming toward him, pushing a barrel organ. They stopped as they came to the houses and the woman seized the handle and out came, "Connais-tu le pays?" at a pace very unbecoming to its original pathos! And all at once blinds were pulled aside, doors opened, and out came women, some with

children in their arms. They were tidying up their hair and buttoning their loose jackets, and their faces brightened and they exchanged banter as they came, holding their skirts back and gathering into groups. Dirty little ragamuffins stood close up round the organ, and a thin little man, a tailor by the basting threads that clung to his clothes, walked into the middle of the street in his stocking feet, waved his arms and legs, and started a dance. The women laughed at him. Two girls seized hold of each other and began to whirl till their skirts flew out. That started it, and at once they all began to dance. Mothers went back to put their babies in the cradle or pushed them into the arms of some urchins standing about, and started dancing. Pallieter watched them, much amused. The red-haired girl went round with a rusty mug, and everyone gave a cent or two.

The woman went on grinding "The Merry Widow," "Die Wacht am Rhein," and the waltz from "Faust," till suddenly a policeman appeared, pushing all the children away, and ordered the startled woman:

"No organs allowed here without a license from the authorities. Come, move off!"

"Surely anyone can play a tune here if they want?"

"Yes, if she doesn't ask for money."

"All right, then, she needn't collect!" Pallieter said to him, and, turning to the woman, he said: "Lend me the organ awhile. I sha'n't ask for money, so I can play!! Come on, dance away, and I'll turn the organ. Ye mun ha' some fun i' the fine weather."

He seized the barrel organ and turned the handle, fit to crack it.

The women and the children began to dance again.

Pallieter was glad to see it and sang out the words to the lively tune.

CHAPTER TWENTY

SNOW

ALLIETER looked out at the sky every day for clouds that would bring snow. Snow, pure white snow that makes the bare face of winter look cheerful, makes everything white and rejuvenates the black soil. But snow did not come. For whole days thin clouds were driven through the sky by a fierce north wind that froze the rapid river, the flooded meadows, and the canals with ice, three or four inches thick. That was a grand sight—a festival indeed for Pallieter and Marieke, the smooth, glistening ice, on which they could fly and sweep like birds!

Every morning the windows were covered with wonderful embroideries of frost, but the real Spirit of the Winter, the gentle beneficent snow, kept away somewhere at the North Pole and sulked.

Pallieter longed for it as a sick man longs for fine weather. He said, "A winter an' no snow is like a summer without sunshine!"

But on Christmas Eve snow fell in the night, unseen, in thick soft flakes, steadily increasing till it was morning.

Pallieter woke first. His first thought was of Marieke, quietly asleep on his arm, and he bent to wake her with a kiss; but something white caught his eyes, and he looked at the open window and, behold! the branch of the walnut tree, always so black against the sky, was now glistening white with snow. He shouted out and sat up in bed. The whole world was white. "Lord! Lord!" And Pallieter jumped out of bed, and rushed to the window. Intense cold met his face; he could not speak; he was overpowered with joy. Snow, snow lay over everything, thick and white—on the fields, on the hedges, ditches, trees, farms, and roads, all white and speckless, dropped from heaven with the innocent freshness of a child.

This whiteness deadened all sounds and made the earth as silent as a church.

Pallieter took in all this splendor at a glance; his heart bounded; he got into his trousers, rejoicing, and ran downstairs, shouting, "Here's good luck!"

He threw open the door and would have drawn the snow inside, but it lay there so virginal, too light even to bear the weight of a sparrow.

"Someone 'll have to be the first," he exclaimed, and, crossing himself, he turned over into the snow, rolling about and running through the soft chilly carpet, beating and stamping like a man swimming.

Marieke had come to the window to look, and cried out with delight, clapping her hands:

"Oh, how lovely! So white, so white!"

A snowball flew past her head as she spoke, and she

burst out laughing because it didn't hit her, and called out, "I'm comin' out to play!"

Then Pallieter started making a snow man, and she helped him. He piled up a huge body, and she rolled the snow into a ball, bigger and bigger, and that was the head. They could hardly lift it on to the body between them. Pallieter put an old hat from the scarecrow on to it, put a broom into its hand, and with his fingers pushed in eyes, nose, and mouth, and stuck a pipe in.

They saw Charlot coming home from mass.

"Hide yersel'," he said to Marieke.

She got behind a tree and made snowballs.

Charlot was twice as fat with all her winter clothes on, so many skirts and bodices. She was wearing a worsted hood trimmed with green glass beads, thick socks and pattens on her feet, a red and green plaid round her body, and a rabbit-fur collar round her neck.

She was smiling. Then all at once a snowball hit her head and knocked the hood all awry. She was startled and set off running as fast as her heavy body could in so many clothes. The snowballs hit her on all sides—two on the back of her head, three struck her huge legs and back, one caught her just as she got inside the door.

As Pallieter and Marieke burst out laughing, she rushed out of doors again and shouted angrily:

"An't ye 'shamed to gie me a fright like that? Lawk'a'

mussie! My heart's all of a dither!" And she went in and slammed the door.

Then they threw snowballs at each other and the air was full of flying missiles smashing against one another, bursting against the trees, till one flew through a window and sent the glass splintering into the house. Then Charlot reappeared, rating at the snow man because Pallieter was hiding behind the water butt and Marieke had gone round to the back door. So she went grumbling back to the kitchen.

Pallieter stayed behind and threw snowballs at the weathercock, which was the figure of a man pulling a long nose at the wind; at the satyr heads that supported the projecting beams, the ornaments on the roof, and the baskets of fruit carved on the gable.

"Come in for yer coffee!" shouted Charlot. Pallieter smelled the fine aroma of the coffee and hurried into the house. Fried ham with scrambled eggs on it was put on the table, piping hot, and they drank coffee and ate up the ham till their lips and fingers shone with grease, and three times Charlot renewed the piled-up plate of bread.

Out of doors the world was white and reflected clear light into the whole room. Gradually the work of the day broke through the whiteness. The windmill across the Nethe in its white coat began to wave its arms against the gray sky, the small black figure of a farmer was crossing the sloping field, and the clear tinkle of sleigh bells came from the highroad. Troops of black crows swept down from the tower into the white fields.

"We'll ha' the sleigh out for a drive!" cried Pallieter, with his mouth full. "We must ha' a treat! Heaven's come down on earth! Look sharp!"

They both went to wrap themselves up, each with a bear-skin cap and fur coat. Pallieter brought out the elegant sleigh from the cart shed and harnessed Beiaard to it; the horse was hung with large brass bells that rang out at the least shake.

While waiting for Marieke, he let out the fowls, but after pecking for a minute they scuttled back into their shed and huddled together. Only the big green cock with the red-and-gold crest flew up on to the fence and crowed lustily over the quiet snowy land, then clapped his wings and walked in again as answering crows floated back from some village beyond the empty spaces.

Then came Marieke and jumped gayly into the sleigh. Charlot, who was just cleaning carrots and sprouts for the soup that was already on the fire with a big piece of beef in it, came outside and said:

"It do look nice. Can ye tak' me along as far as the blacksmith's?"

"Ay! Get in!" said Marieke.

Charlot stepped in, well pleased. "Ye'll bring me

home ag'in," she said. "The soup's on the fire already!"

Loebas barked. Pallieter lighted his pipe and leaned forward; the whip cracked; the bells rang; and off they went into the great white country.

Trees flew past, the white fields swerved aside from them, and Charlot held on tight to Marieke in a fright. Swiftly they cut through the snow and made no sound. It was a joy like walking, drifting, floating through air.

It was all white—trees, roads, and fields, shut off overhead by the gray sky. The farms were lost in snow; not a soul to be seen, only here and there a single black crow as it swooped down on to a field. Away off they could see the ruddy glow of the blacksmith's shed. There Pallieter drew up to get the horse sharpened.

The two women went up to the flickering, smoldering fire, while Pallieter, to save time, helped the smith and his boy by blowing the bellows.

While they were hammering at the growing iron and the fire flamed up red in the smithy, Pallieter could not take his eyes off the doorway and the white country stretching out far and wide. He was itching to be off again in the snow, into the lovely pure white world; so he blew harder at the bellows till the sparks flew up to the roof.

Charlot began to complain that her soup would boil over. "An' it weren't for the snow, I'd be home afoot," she grumbled, and stamped with impatience.

But Beiaard was soon ready. Charlot hurried into the sleigh first, and they drove off.

"Mak' haste," she said, "for the soup!"

Then suddenly she saw the sleigh was taking another turning.

"Why, lad!" she cried, perplexed, "ye're going the wrong way!

"Straight ahead all the way!" said Pallieter.

"An' I mun get home for the soup!" she wailed, miserably.

"We'll need no soup," replied Pallieter, calmly touching Beiaard with the whip; and they went farther.

But Charlot could not keep quiet, and wanted to get out and walk.

"The more you talk the harder we'll go," said Pallieter. "Ye're bound to come along!"

"Then I'll say no more about the soup," she said meekly, but added, spitefully, "But I'll think o't all the same!"

In a quarter of an hour's time they reached the pine woods and the moors that begin abruptly on the north bank of the Nethe, where the fertile fields of Brabant lie to the south.

Wonderful the fir woods in the winter, so grand and solemn it was. The fir trees seemed to bend and stretch out their arms to receive the snow; and where they grew close together, forming endless aisles of snow

bearing trees on the crisp frosted ground, it felt like going into a church.

Prayer came naturally to the lips in that strange, soundless place. All three of them listened in awe to the solem quiet of the trees, and their hearts shrank so that they hardly dared to move on till some bird chuckled or Beiaard shook his bells.

Beiaard's bells tinkled delightfully—a delicious peal across the lonely snow-covered moorland. They seemed to start the landscape ringing; the woods rang with it; it rained silvery cadences from the tree tops, echoing far and wide over this region of whiteness.

They met nothing on their road but one poor old woman in a cloak carrying a bundle of firewood on her head toward a little cottage in the distance. Her footmarks made a long chain behind her in the snow, all the way from the wood.

What a joy to drive rushing through the soft snow in this depth of whiteness, silver tinkling, and the holy silence of nature! This was a holiday that did good to the soul. Pallieter kept standing. He stood erect, drink-

ing in all the joy of it, cracking his whip till it echoe again and again, or singing a verse of some grand ol song. Loebas raced on in front and barked at the crow

At last they came to a village and stopped at an in called "The Swan." They went i just to get something to drink. was a quiet little place—just group of houses round a church red brick with white stripes, no covered with a snowy mantle. was as quiet as could be here. TH living seemed forgotten, like the dead whose little crooke black crosses stuck out of the snow in the church-yard.

The clock in the tower struck ten, and the sound rolle away over the roofs and the fields.

Pallieter wanted to get a look at the country from th church tower. While the women sat by the warm stov chatting with the landlady about the severe weather, H went out to look for the sexton, who was a shoemak with a wooden leg. He was not easy to persuade, b money won him over.

They climbed the winding stone staircase togethe crept through the dusty woodwork where the two bel hung in the light from the belfry windows, and throug the chinks Pallieter could see the country, farms an woods, all in white, down below him, and away in th distance other church towers; but he was determined get up higher and near the top of the steeple. He flun open a wooden shutter and, behold! the land laid ba her soul.

Right under him was the little hamlet with its small box-edged gardens, and the one street leading out into the open fields that stretched away for miles with woods and plains and canals and solitary houses and revolving windmills, turrets and roads lined with trees that led to more villages, till far beyond came the hills of Grobbendonck, faintly outlined against a sky of leaden gray.

Human life was of no account in all this whiteness; it was hardly to be seen—one single black figure on a field or the bridge over a canal, and a cart going along the highroad.

Oh, this white, white world! Just as it was not wanted any more for life and reproduction, but only to be beautiful, pure, and white. Everything was as quiet as the snow itself.

"The earth is at prayer! Let me ring the bell!"

"Nay, nay!" said the sexton. "Not till to-morrow! There's no service to-day!"

But Pallieter went below to the belfry, got on to one

of the beams, and pushed and pushed till the bell began to move; then the clapper struck the bronze and it was in full swing. The sound of the bells filled the belfry and floated out through the windows in a wild chorus of sounds.

The sexton tugged at his scanty locks, bewildered, and down below the priest looked up out of his window astonished.

When Pallieter had thoroughly enjoyed the fun he went back to "The Swan" to have some coffee, and they drove home by another way.

Here and there they could hear the quiet sound of threshing, the snap of a gun, and from behind a coppice came the squeal of a pig that was being killed. Pallieter urged on Beiaard, and as they reached the place the pig was just dead and the butcher was running the blood into an earthen pan. It spilled over in red splashes on the snow. The farmer's wife was lighting a fire to twigs to singe off the bristles.

It was a fine fat pig and Pallieter asked if he could buy the half. They bargained and chaffered until he got the half carcass for a reasonable price. When the entrails had been removed he carried it into the sleigh and gave it the place of honor between Marieke and Charlot, and so they drove home through the white winter landscape.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

OLD SONGS

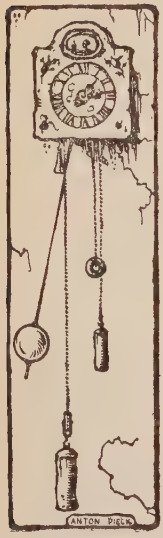
FTER midday the sky changed and became pale blue, with a watery sunlight.

The cold was piercing, and Pallieter sat by the glowing hearth with a pipe, Marieke with her sewing beside him. Charlot was darning stockings at the table. It was quiet and cozy. Tybaert, the cat, was purring on Marieke's lap; the clock on the wall ticked gently, and the brass caldron hummed over the fire. Pallieter liked watching the flames that spurted up around the huge blocks of wood. It was very peaceful. The fire crackled, and out of doors, on the frozen canal by the convent, nuns and novices were sliding. Their chatter and gay laughter echoed fresh and clear through the air. On the other side of the river boys had swept the ice clear, and there was a whole crowd skating—people from the town, as well as country folks—and venders of oranges and doughnuts were going about.

Pallieter stayed at home for the carol-singers who came to wish a happy Christmas. Sometimes these folk

had such fine old carols, so simple and touching. Several parties had been already, children as well as grown-ups.

The bell rang again, and five women came in, three of them wearing hoods, the others with bright-colored shawls round their heads.



"May we sing for 'ee, sir?"

"Let's hear," said Pallieter.

And with wailing voices they sang the pathetic carol:

"It was on a New-year's morning,
It was on the New-year's Day,
That Mary Magdalena, the sinner,
Met Jesus coming her way.
Rise up, O Mary Magdalena!
Rise up from thy deep distress,
For thy sins they be all forgiven thee
An' were it double thy wickedness." . . .

Bread and spice cake were given to them when their singing was finished. They were hardly gone when the three blind men came in. One of them carried a paper star set around with flowers.

"We be come here as the Three Kings wi' this star, an' we can sing 'ee a fine new song."

" 'Tis pity ye bain't dressed up."

"We ha' no sight of each other, sir."

"Stop a bit!" said Pallieter. "Ye'll let get a deal more money with the right clothes on. Charlot, fetch some of those old clothes out of the attic!"

Then Pallieter began to dress them up.

The first one, who was short and stout, with red inflamed eyes, got a piece of white wadding pasted on his face and a blue nightcap on his head. The second was a small hunchback with closed eyelids. Marieke cut out a paper crown for him and stuck it over with silver paper off chocolate; they fastened that round his felt hat and put one of Charlot's blue aprons round his shoulders for a mantle. The blind men liked it and felt one another over, chuckling. The third man, who carried a cigar box to collect the money, was a tall, lean fellow with a face like Leo XIII, and the white of his eyeballs was turned up.

They blackened his face and put a crushed-up tall hat on his head. In a few minutes they were all ready as Gaspar, Melchior, and Balthasar, the three wise men.

"Now sing to us," said Pallieter.

The three wretches, who could not see one another and never had been able to see, laughed and joked at one another all the same because they knew they were dressed up.

They began to sing with a smile on their faces, while the little man waved his Star about. Their voices quavered and cracked, and it went on almost without any tune in it:

"Shepherds bring milk, and spicery.
Jesus doth in a manger lie.
Hang up your coats across the door·
His foster father sweeps the floor.

"Mary anoints him with her hands
And Joseph brings the swaddling bands;
The Infant cries with thirst distressed,
His mother gives the Child the breast.

"Sweet-singing birds around them sweep,
An angel rocks the Child to sleep;
Then Joseph works while day is dim,
And washes all the cloths for Him.

"He makes the fire and brings the wood,
So they shall all have warmth and food,
And Joseph's joy doth much increase
When the sweet Infant's wailings cease.

"Sleep, Jesus, sleep, Immanuel!
Sleep, mighty Prince of Israel!
Thousands of folk are blithe and gay
For joy that thou art born to-day.

"The good God up in heaven's gate
Is willing to withhold his hate.
For Jesus' sake his wrath will cease.
The Child shall bring good will and peace.

"The Virgin Mother, sweet and mild,
She clothes and feeds the holy Child.
His hands caress her breast and hair,
And leave a benediction there.

"From Jesus flows a sweet desire,
Sweetness that set my soul afire.
Bethlehem, the blessed, so I say,
Thy lowly stall is heaven to-day!"

Pallieter was quite touched; his tears fell.

The three blind men stood waiting eagerly for money and spice cake.

"What mun a gie to 'em?" asked Charlot.

"'Tis more than money can buy," said Pallieter.

"Gie us what you think best, sir," said the blind men.

"Give 'em that half pig," ordered Pallieter.

The three men were astonished indeed. They felt the carcass all over with their dirty hands, chattering to one another, overjoyed. All three caught hold of it, dropped the cigar box and the star, and dragged the pig away with them to the convent, singing as they went.

Carol-singers went on coming till it was evening. The convent beguines [1] went on sliding on the canal, and there was still a crowd on the mill meadow.

"Now I'm off skating, too," said Pallieter.

He dressed himself for the cold and went out through the garden. There he stepped into his boat, which was frozen in the ice, and sat down to put his skates on; he stamped about to try the snow-clogged ice, then pushed off, swaying light as a bird through the air.

He skated along over the solid empty river-way, his head just reaching above the dyke, so he had a good sight over the landscape.

The sun was just sinking fiery red in the evening purple; it touched the snow with crimson, and the waxing moon glittered faintly. One clear star was blinking above the mill, whose sails still revolved in the twilight.

[1] Beguines are members of Netherlands lay sisterhood not bound by vows.

Pallieter skated on and on, bending slightly, as if carried by the wind, and came at last to Duffel. By this time it was dark and you could see the lights in the houses. The silvery moon laid shadows in the snow. All sounds had died away. He took hold of a barge stuck fast in the ice, pulled himself up on to it, and sat there looking into the night. In the yellow glow of the lamp-lighted cabin he could see a woman singing her child to sleep.

With his skates slung over his shoulder Pallieter walked home along the dyke. It was night by this time, and the moon filled the air with silver-bluish light, stars twinkled high and clear, and it was as bright as day; very quiet and solitary. The snow crunched under his feet and his short blue shadow kept him company, while the shadow of the trees, stretched black on the ground, bent over him as he went along. The moon moved along with him behind the black trees. The trees on the other side of the river, standing in the full moonlight, had stars among their glistening branches; they were trees of crystal, bubbling fountains of light. A marvelous stillness hung over it all; the snow and the magical blue moonlight made it a fairyland.

All at once above his head came a mighty rush of wings. He looked up and saw a flight of wild swans, a long, long row that stretched across the sky. Pallieter stood motionless to watch them, and heard them sweeping gradually away past the glittering moon, against which they showed dark for a moment and then with its light behind them pass on into the limitless winter

night . . . and he went home with the flight of these mysterious birds in his mind. When he reached home he found four beguines with Marieke and Charlot round a kettle of warm brandy in the dim light; its blue flame lighted up their eager faces and the room smelt of waffles newly baked.

"Hurrah!" cried Pallieter, whose stomach was as empty as a bagpipe, and he drew up to the table and demolished a dozen of them, pouring a good dash of brandy over each.

After that they lighted the lamp, and Pallieter played the real old "goose game" with the sisters till it was time to go to midnight mass.

Pallieter watched them go, and saw the people coming in along the roads in all directions. Then everything was quiet again, white and silvery.

To-day was the birth of Christ. The sheep turned their faces to the east and the bees hummed within their hives.

Peace descended on the world.

High up in the sky the stars shone and here below mortals prayed for peace, divine peace.

Pallieter's soul was moved; he shivered, then fetched his hunting horn, and out on the convent rampart he blew out into the moonlight night.

The slow, long notes floated over the snow-covered fields and melted into the convent woods and the silvery distance. As he turned indoors a distant echo rose from a far-off village.

Happy as a child was Pallieter with his sweet Marieke

in his arms. This had been a fine day, a banquet for the heart and soul. A spiritual joy.

And he fell asleep with a smile on his face, while the cold white world lay all around and peace over all. The divine peace was kind!

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

THAW MUSIC

FTER a day that had coated the trees with a hoarfrost filling up every crevice that had not been caught by the snow, an unexpected thaw set in. A sudden mildness pervaded the atmosphere. The snow-clad roofs and trees soon felt it and began to melt and drip; icicles slipped off the eaves; the snow began to shrink; the ice cracked and burst. Three days later blocks of ice were drifting down the river with the tide.

"The thaw is making music through all the countryside," said Pallieter to the priest as they stood on the little stone bridge over the "Shirt Sleeve," a narrow arm of the Nethe that wound round by the convent. They stood listening to the voice of the thaw singing round the convent walls. Very solemn and ancient the convent seemed that February morning on Candlemas Day. Red roofs and gables and white walls, all dripping wet, the gnarled apple and pear trees in the little bits of garden all soaking with damp, but shining in the clear, faint sunlight. Nothing much of a sun, but it made the waterlogged earth glitter as if it were full-grown summer

sunshine. It hung in the sky fresh and new, like a little bright golden pool. Here and there in the ridges of the roof tiles, on a tree, in a flower pot or a turned-over bucket, a bit of snow still lurked, the same snow that had made the world look so bright; but his day was over and done for. Under the snow new life was awakening and he must make way for that. His enemies had found him out and were advancing, led by the fair young sun god. They drew their shining weapons on him and he was vanquished and died, poor fellow, fainting into dripping and streaming water.

From everything came the soft music of raindrops gleaming in the sunlight like ropes of pearls, that hung from trees and roofs. It banged down from the gutters in rapid, heavy drops, and hummed in the down pipes, splashed on the pavement, and fell like marbles on to the melting and fading ice. It played in all sorts of measures, quick and slow, dripping notes, banging staccato raps on pails and barrels, rattling and gurgling; more and more notes were added to this fugue as you listened to the music of the thaw. It was the song of the mighty young sun, the first sounds of the coming spring. The bright heavens were full of the pealing of bells.

"The good weather will soon be here!" exclaimed the priest. And after a moment's silence and sigh: "'Tis pity, Pallieter, that you should leave our village. Why not stay and build another house farther on? An' sure when a year is over you'll be used to the new Nethe and think well of it. Say you'll stay."

"'Tis true what you say," replied Pallieter. "Maybe

the place may be twice as fine after the change, but the thought and desire to live anywhere and everywhere has got into my blood and go I must. It came to me in September, on my wedding day, when I saw the storks flying away high up in the air!"

"And where shall ye go to?" asked the priest.

"Don't know yet. 'Tis all one to me."

"There'll be a deal to see," said the priest, "an' if I weren't as old I'd go with ye."

"And your cassock?" asked Pallieter.

"Ay, I'd forgotten that!" said the priest, laughing.

"Come on, let's go to Fransoo's and drink a glass of beer in honor of this water symphony!"

They turned away from the convent and walked across the rampart. The great trees, three long double rows like the aisle of a church, showing glimpses of the landscape as if through windows, dripped great, shiny drops on them as quick as rain—a wild, bright avalanche of pearls. They rattled on the trees, jumped from one branch to another, united, or one fell quicker than another. Sometimes a great handful came down at once, cracking right to the priest's round hat, then slow again, and again in a great splash on to Pallieter's shoulders, and he was wet as a dish-cloth.

"Let 'em come," said Pallieter; "they smell of spring!" And they let themselves get soaked till the priest's cassock was streaming and Pallieter's hat seemed to have a chain of beads round it. They both shone with moisture.

"Listen!" said Pallieter.

"Hear that!" exclaimed the priest.

Their ears drank in the music of the cool and glistening raindrops.

The country was painted in fine and delicate tones. Snow lay about in patches, and thin vapor veiled the horizon and softened the red roofs and black trees. The watery sun wove bright gold threads into the mist and made the distance look like some old Eastern fabric.

"Look!" cried Pallieter, running to a patch of snow on the grass. "A snowdrop! A snowdrop!" There through the snow, in spite of the cold and want of air, the little flower had pushed its way through and hung up its innocent white bell.

"God has put His foot on the earth already!" cried Pallieter, rejoicing.

"We may well thank God that the winter is over. We are having a fine Candlemas," said the priest.

"I can hear the light breaking through."

"The trees are weeping with joy!" said the other.

"Come on, let's go and have a glass of beer with Fransoo; let's drink to the coming of spring." And so saying, Pallieter took his arm and they went on to cross the river. But the ice had broken up and drifted about in great yellowish blocks, cracking as it was dragged along by the current. The little boat was still frozen fast in the ice.

"But, Pallieter, we can't get across there!" said the priest, laughing. "Let's go round by the village."

"Oh, that's easily done!" said Pallieter. "Get hold of my hand."

"Nay, nay!" said the priest. "I'm still too young to throw my life away."

"I can jump," said Pallieter.

The priest let himself be overruled; he had firm faith in Pallieter's agility.

Pallieter took the priest on his back, stepped down the side of the dyke, and sprang on to one of the drifting blocks. It creaked and slipped under, but before Pallieter's feet could get wet he had sprung on to three or four blocks one after the other till at last he stood in the middle of the stream on a firm sheet of ice.

"Go on!" cried the priest.

"Nay," said Pallieter, setting the priest on his feet. "Feel how good it is to walk on the water like this."

And so they drifted down the river. Charlot had caught sight of them and rushed out of doors in a fright, clasping her hands and shouting:

"They're drownin'! The priest's drownin'! Bring a rope! Help! Help!"

She ran down to the river as hard as she could, and followed the drifting men. But she was startled out of her wits when the priest called out to her:

"Well, Charlot! don't 'ee think I make a very good Saint Peter?"

Her stout person trembled, and in her agitation she called out, "Nay, man . . ."

They let themselves drift in this way down to Fransoo's—to celebrate the death of winter and his requiem of glittering raindrops.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

BAGPIPES

HEN the ice and snow were melted, the sun disappeared for awhile and a fine, drizzling rain fell for a fortnight. Then a mild wind blew out of the pale south, from behind the convent woods, and two days after Ash Wednesday the black branches of the trees and shrubs shewed a sprinkling of thickened leaf buds.

Pallieter saw this one morning from his window in the tower and shouted out: "I see the spring! I can see the spring!" He let his breakfast stand and was absorbed in watching the first signs of life.

The sun was hidden behind high, thin clouds, but the horizon never looked more clear and open. In the distant trees the black magpie nests were plainly to be seen and turning windmills were visible through the branches. The whole country round was bare and open to the view as if for the first time, right away to the rich background of the trees.

"O trees! ye hands of the Earth!" cried Pallieter. "The hands with which she does her work, with which she prays and rejoices and raises up to heaven every year

all her mighty forces in rich profusion; with her hand she offers her beautiful sweet fruits to humankind Long live the trees!"

And looking round, there across the river was a man perched in one of the trees, lopping off branches with an ax. Away farther a farmer and his wife were clipping the hedge of their orchard. It made a cheerful sound in the so peaceful landscape.

"'Tis a new moon to-day!" cried Pallieter. "Things will grow like steam!" And off he went downstairs for his pruning knife.

"Come and have yer coffee first. Ye're empty!" called out Marieke.

"We've had ours," said Charlot.

"Just not now, my love," he said to Marieke. "But come out o' doors and see the spring. The air 'll be good for ye and yer little one; it 'll make him hurry up."

He drew Marieke out into the orchard.

"Just look at the trees!" he burst out. "They're stretching themselves up!" He broke off a twig from a clove tree. "Look at this delicious bit o' wood. It smells of oranges!" and he stuck it into Marieke's thick hair. The trees stood round them, looking very strange in their black nakedness, with their gnarled and twisted and misshapen branches, as if risen miraculously out of the ground and petrified in the first gush of their life's sap.

Yet they were supple and yielding as the waist of a young girl, and they had all felt the upwelling ardent force of life. Among them were hollow, twisted appl

trees looking as hard as rock, apparently dead to all life —fagot wood! Yet the first mild wind would awake them again, burst the joints of their armor, and tiny buds would appear, just as quick and numerous as on the apricot trees.

Pallieter put the stepladder against a pear tree that had only borne two seasons and still looked black and miserable from the rain and cold.

He mounted the ladder, caught hold of a branch with the shears, looked at it carefully, then cut, and the black branch dropped off, showing a clear slice of the young wood, white as an apple, and Pallieter laughed out aloud like a boy when he saw it.

"How new! How young and fresh! Come and look!" And he pushed his nose against it and touched it with the tip of his tongue to taste the bitter sap.

Marieke came up at his call, but would not risk her heavy figure on the ladder.

"Pity," he said, "for it tastes and smells so good!" And he went on pruning.

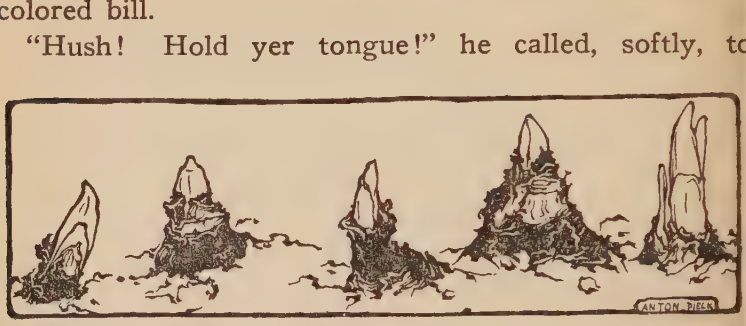
The tree began to look quite different now. It was younger when it stood shaved and full of white spots, fresh and lively as a child in a clean shirt after its Saturday tub. Pallieter exchanged a joke with the men pruning on the other side of the river, who shouted back at him. Then he began on another tree. Charlot went after him to pick up the branches.

"It's good firewood," she said.

Then suddenly a blackbird flew into the garden, perched in a top branch of the rugged pear tree, preened

his feathers, and took a look round. Pallieter watched him sitting, coal black against the sky with his saffron-colored bill.

"Hush! Hold yer tongue!" he called, softly, to



Charlot, and the blackbird threw out a handful of odd notes, waited a bit as if trying to find something better, and then began to whistle long-drawn tones, clear and high, gradually coming down to low and mellow sounds, and then suddenly let himself go and sang for all he was worth, till he was out of breath, took another look round, and dropped a note or two and flew off.

"What a mad fellow!" said Pallieter.

The blackbird music still echoed in the air when a sudden commotion started in the hedge, a noisy flutter-ing and chirruping of little sparrows fighting for a hen bird; it was a rushing and pushing, like school children let loose; but the hen got free and flew off to the rampart trees, with the whole flock after her.

Marieke's voice called out, delighted: "Come and look! Come and look! The tulips are coming up!"

Pallieter jumped off the ladder and got on his knees

beside her to look for the light-green spear points which were pushing up out of the ground in search of spring.

While they were searching, a great rush of wings passed just over their heads. He looked up and saw a great flock of pigeons sweeping over the garden, making for the open fields. Pallieter looked at the fields through the bare hedge, and the pale light on them. Farmers and horses were at work and the sails of boats passed along the river.

"I'm off for a walk!" said Pallieter. A puff of wind sent the smell of fresh-turned soil and manure over the gardens.

"Get us a good soup ready to-day. I shan't want coffee!" And he went through the kitchen and took a chunk of bread and butter, and with a run and a jump he was over the hedge and in the road. Loebas was after him and ran on ahead, barking excitedly. As soon as he had finished eating he lighted a pipe and contentedly watched the blue smoke floating up in rings. He sniffed up the fresh air and gazed with surprise at the old new landscape before him. Distant windmills making crosses on the horizon, churches and farms were now in view that he never caught a sight of through the thick summer foliage. He felt his youth renewed. His heart had been oppressed by the life indoors; now it throbbed and panted to taste the good breath of the fields.

From here and there came the sound of an ax and the shrill crow of a cock; but for that the air was all quiet, but a quiet full of suppressed life that was awake and

silently at work. Pallieter felt and tasted and smelled this force that pulsed through all creation. It passed into his being with every heartbeat; it filled him with happiness; it made him feel strong and capable, and he began to sing with the bells that were playing a fine old tune that the wind wafted toward him over the fields. They were ringing out gold and silver notes and a farmer pruning a way off trolled out with them:

"They sat on the bank of a river," etc.

They came now to flooded meadows. A seamew hovered screaming above them, and Loebas, seeing it, threw his nose up and plunged into the water in a shower of glistening splashes. Pallieter stood to watch where along the Nethe dyke some men, no bigger than ants, were felling a row of trees.

"Poor beggars! Just as they were getting their new blood."

But life doesn't die; no, it's always coming back again, for there on the sloping field, behind a plow drawn by a yoke of oxen, walked a woman, heavy with child, and she was sowing seed as she went. He took off his boots and waded through the flooded meadow. The sky showed some blue, and suddenly the sun burst through a rift in the cloud and shed golden light on the black convent wood, and, behold! the black trees turned ruddy purple and for awhile the scene was bright. On a road where the light fell two figures were walking—a man and woman with bags over their shoulders—and the road went on into the darkness behind the trees. Then

a cuckoo called; the sun closed in again. Pallieter danced with joy.

"The buds are swelling, swelling like a mother's breast!"

It was spring, the first rush of life to the earth. It quivered through the whole universe and nothing could keep it back. The harrows of heaven had scarred and wounded it by day and by night. Earth's body had been massacred almost to death, but the soul, the divine soul, had remained pure and intact, and now rose strong into every fiber of earthly things.

Spring had returned rich and strong as ever, to live, to do nothing but live!

Farther on, sheep shearing was going on. While one was waiting in his thick and dirty fleece in the pen, another, just sheared, ran off, bleating, glad to feel the fresh air on his skin.

The whole countryside was fragrant with the odor of sprouting wood, resounded with the stroke of ax and pruning knife, and the clang of a distant blacksmith's hammer chimed in. Pallieter came through a coppice where rotting leaves were caked together into a solid carpet, and a big bird flew up, speaking, in front of them. He could smell the living yeast working in the ground and the trees, and laid his hand on them to feel it. He could not take his eyes off the trees, and stood watching and admiring them at work. How full of sap they were inside their wood, and how it pushed and struggled to get free! The tremendous force with which

it animated the landscape made them shoot up and turn and bend and twist. How the fine twigs budded when they felt the sun, and pushed out a leaf, then a flower, and then fruit! Surely trees are the hands of the Earth.

Pallieter heaved a sigh. He would have liked to be a tree and feel the full force of awakening life course through his veins. Why, there was a veteran! the giant carcass of an elm, maybe a thousand years old, soaked in moisture. That sight made him cry out: "Never did God show me a better one!" It was a protruding sinew of the earth, cracked through the middle, full of rents and fissures, green with damp and plastered with moss and scales of fungus, overgrown with ivy, and up in a crevice of the split-open trunk a little clump of grass sprouted and two small daisies blossomed, one still abud, the other open, milk-white with a crimson edge, as if it had been dipped in wine. And there sat Pallieter inside the living wreck of this old tree and threw his arms round it, quite overcome, exclaiming, "O my brother!"

When Pallieter heard the twelve-o'clock horn sounding from a neighboring farm he was so hungry, and so far from home, that he started off to the house to get some dinner there.

The river lay in the way, but the tide was low, a mere brook between two banks of shiny mud, so he turned up his trousers to his knees, thrust a boot into each pocket, and waded through it.

On the other side of a sort of moat, where old trees had been cut down, was an old-fashioned barn with turrets at the side. A sheep put its head through a breach in the wall and stared stupidly at him; a swan was floating on a stretch of clear water, followed by a little quacking duck. A farm hand stood in the water up to his knees, spearing eels, and behind a shed and the pond the white walls of the farmhouse could be seen through the black trees. Pallieter crossed the little wooden bridge and asked the stout farmer's wife, who was churning in a blue tub at the door, if he could have dinner.

"Why, sure, Pallieter!" answered Sophia. "Come in." She dried her hands on her apron and showed him a place at the long table set out with four-and-twenty

plates or more. The laborers were coming in from all sides—barn, fields, and stables—men and women, and they sat down to the table.

"Ye mun all gie me a potato," cried Pallieter.

"Ye-re welcome to it!" they called out in reply.

Sophia brought in the steaming dish of potatoes and yards of sausage still sputtering from the pan. Then the farmer, a lean man, tapped his plate with a fork, and complete silence followed while the shrill voice of a small boy repeated a paternoster. All the rough hands were folded and eyes lowered, while a hen outside cackled over an egg. Then they all began to eat. Pallieter was raging with hunger. His single slice of bread that morning was long forgotten. He put away some thirty light-yellow potatoes, not a blemish on any of them, and left nothing of his ell of sausage but the point with the bit of string on it, and that he gave to the cat.

While they were eating they heard the rumble of bag-pipes and the quaver of a shrill oboe. All sprang up and went outside. It was four strolling players—three who played the bagpipes, and one with an oboe. They went on with their music without a word. The men were dirty and unkempt, dressed in rags, with colored handkerchiefs round their necks and a bunch of feathers in their hats. They smelled of the open air and the soil

but Pallieter was amazed at the beauty of their music. The bagpipes rumbled in three-toned chords, while the shrill notes of the oboe danced about among them, skipping, trilling, and winding in and out, connecting the incomplete harmony of the pipes.

The farm hands, rather shy of the dirty-looking wanderers, stood leaning against the wall to listen to the music of foreign lands. When the piece was finished the oboe-player went round with his hat, and they all gave something. Then they played another little tune and walked away with dragging steps.

"I'm going with them!" called out Pallieter. "Here, I'll show 'ee the farms." And he went with them from farm to farm, filled more and more with admiration for these wretched wanderers. He asked them questions, but they replied indifferently that they had come from Spain through France, that they had been in South Russia, Italy, and Switzerland, and that they were now going through Holland to Norway.

He could have taken off his hat to them, these wanderers who spent their lives with music in so many lands. There was something grand in them; they were poets. Now the sky had broken open and the sun had come out and, bringing a purple glow into the budding trees, it touched the flooded meadows with silver. Men were at work in the fields, among the trees, in the gardens; they were digging the ground over for vegetables, a wholesome smell. It was so quiet all round that the rumble of carts, not even in sight, could be heard.

As they went on from farm to farm they came near th workhouse hospital and met a troop of invalids out fo a walk in charge of four white sisters. They were gla to be out in the sunshine, a miserable lot of paupers an some wretched-look ing women. On dragged himself o crutches; one siste was pushing a ca with a sort of corps that smiled in it, an a wretch without leg got himself along, u ing irons. One bi gaunt woman leane on a stout sister's arm. Some of them had bandage heads. There was a man with one leg, another wit black patches over his eyes, as well as worn-out wome and sickly children. Those who were not walking abo sat on some fallen trees, talking or watching the labore at work in the fields.

When Pallieter saw this group of miserable being who had come out to feel the February sunshine, he to the musicians to play them a tune. They began, and a the sick folk came as quickly as they could and gathere round the players. There was one fat fellow with a amputated leg, who held up one crutch and began t dance on one leg with the other crutch, shouting: "I' cured! I can go home!" The other sick folk laughed a him, and the sisters smiled.

Then Fransoo appeared suddenly at the door of an ale-house a little way farther, shouting as hard as he could to Pallieter, who said to the musicians: "Come on! We'll get some bagpipe beer over there."

That suited the four players exactly and away they went.

"Here," said Pallieter to Fransoo—"here are four singing birds who get blown along by the wind. Come on, my lad. Here's Wagner, Palestrina, Beethoven, and Schubert, who can shake music out of their pockets. Give 'em beer!"

Each got a big tankard, and they drank greedily till it dripped off their chins.

"Are ye hungry?" Pallieter asked them, tapping his mouth with a finger.

"Ye can have dinner wi' me," cried Fransoo, "and then play the best ye know and turn the whole world into music for us!"

"Ay," they nodded.

"Then first another drink." And they brought more beer for them, and then all six smoked and drank, like good templars. There they sat till early twilight fell, and then went to Fransoo's home. The air was crimson with the sun just setting behind a clump of black trees. The river, now full again, licked it up greedily and the thin bare trees were soaked in it. When the sun sank, its ruddy gold still lingered on the sails of the windmill that loomed motionless against the windless evening sky.

The air was still and very mild. Lights flickered into

the little houses, and in the clear, pale heavens the stars came out. A faint blue mist hid the horizon.

The lamp was lighted and they ate a good dinner of pork and fried potatoes. Fransoo's buxom wife was a skillful cook and served a tasty sauce flavored with cloves, bay leaf, and thyme. Their children took fright at the sight of the wild-looking men and rushed off to bed, screaming. When they had eaten their fill and had another glass, Pallieter said:

"Now let us have something."

They went downstairs, Fransoo's wife with them.

Night had come down over the earth. High up in the dark sky and numerous as the hairs on a dog's back shone the stars. The absolute quiet was immense.

Fransoo made a big fire near the foot of the windmill which it lighted up underneath, while the huge body was in darkness, a black hulk against the starlit heavens.

The fire crackled and sputtered and threw a lurid glow on the rough and tattered wanderers, who sat staring into the blaze and hardly answered when they were spoken to.

"Now begin," said Pallieter, who lay face downward on a heap of straw. And then the three bagpipes began to hum and squeak and the reed-like notes of the oboe trickled clearly in and out and all over the music like raindrops, bringing before Pallieter's eyes fervid Spanish dancers, melancholy Russian songs, lively tunes from the mountains, pathetic melodies from the plains of Brittany. The whole world passed before him in sound, passionate, cheerful, dreamy, and tender.

He listened, entranced. He had never heard the like before. The flickering firelight painted his hands red. Above his head towered the giant black windmill and before his eyes lay the starlit night and the dark, mysterious land where the spring lay brooding. Magnificent music, to hear these strolling players in such a place in the dark night, beside a glowing fire, while other folks were asleep. It made him shiver with delight, while tears dropped down on his hands. Well, now he, too, was going out to see the world!

Charlot was asleep long ago, but Marieke was still in the garden. The smooth river reflected the little bright stars and she leaned over the fence, watching and listening to the music of the bagpipes over there where she saw a fire burning.

She knew that Pallieter would be there. It was just like him whom she loved with all her heart. She had been waiting all day for him, but he would not be home yet, he was so happy there by the fire; that was just the sort of thing he loved. But she was sure he loved her

as well. Maybe he was thinking of her while he listened to the music. Ay, she was sure of that, and the thought made her happy. She would like to have been with him, to fall asleep leaning on his breast, lulled by the sad, simple music.

"My vagabond!" she sighed contentedly as she lingered there listening to the bagpipes humming through the soft spring night.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

THE BELLS OF ROME

PALLIETER lay on his back in the grass, watching the course and shape of the clouds.

The whole March sky lay open before his eyes. There were crazy little clouds shifting and changing and altering the picture every minute. High overhead a huge dark mass, big with rain and hail, loomed, a leaden lump. It floated past the sun, dragging everything with it till it came into collision with a great mountain of white cloud which broke it up into strips of paler color that floated up higher and higher in the sky and settled themselves into timid little white cloud tufts. Meanwhile from beneath the horizon a mountain chain of rosy clouds appeared and floated round to the south. Their tops were as white as snow, delicately shaped against the pure blue sky, with the towers of distant villages etched on them. Quite a Swiss landscape. But their crests puffed out and the little mountains rose up into towers and drifted toward the sun, their heads turned gold and silver, and underneath they were dull purple and brown. It became a cloud cathedral with

windows, aisles, and niches—a Walhalla! But while you watched them they split up into tufts like wool, then floated down, crumpled up, and dissolved in rain upon the clear, sunny landscape.

Next came an enormous white cloud, solid like a great cauliflower and set up as monarch of all. The sun blazed full on it so brightly that it made Pallieter's eyes smart. It reigned there for a time supreme till a fleet came and attacked it on all sides, warships, huge-bellied vessels, brown and white, and they overcame it and swallowed up its glory. Others came and reared their heights above it, and others again rushed wildly across, shifting and changing all the time. Building and destroying, pushing and swarming like live things perpetually in motion. Then a delicate, quiet blue peeped out between the clouds, and the sun, the Easter sun, for to-morrow was Easter. The new, pure, tender sun reveled in this cloud-play like an infant awake in a white bed. It drew out long beams of light, shot gold and silver rays on to the purple, yellow, and white, and crackled sparks into the air. Pigeons came and joined in the game; flocks of them at a time flew up and swooped down again, like bits of white paper against the purple cloud and like flecks of gold when the sunbeams touched them.

A grand spectacle, this sport of the clouds; it might keep a lonely shepherd amused for a whole day.

Below all this lay the young earth, green and fresh. A gentle breeze moved across it with the shadows of the clouds and the bright sunlight. The trees looked black but the sunlight revealed them in a yellow-green veil.

and that was the bursting leaf buds. Only just here and there apple trees were pink and blushing into life. The Nethe glistened with silver and the boats had bulging white sails.

Quite unexpectedly the sky turned gray and somber; a shower of rain and hail came down slanting on the grass and across Pallieter's face, and he jumped up, laughing, and ran to shelter by a woodstack. From here he could see the windmill, and farther off other red sails revolving in the streaks of sunlight. Then all at once the sun shone on the convent woods, wet with hail; a bright rainbow appeared and stretched across the dark sky, above the slender windmill.

The cocks crowded loudly. Pallieter smelled violets under the woodstack.

"For Marieke!" he cried, and began to look among the short new grass, and there they were, the dear little Good Friday flowers! He was going to gather them, but stood up again, murmuring, "Nay, I'll leave 'em; they're so fine there."

He jumped over the brook and walked home along the fields. Life was renewing everything; the air was full of scent and promise; awakening thrills quivered through the earth. Wherever a tuft of grass was growing, a couple of daisies lifted up their faces, and on all sides sparrows were chirping.

The good, wholesome fields had shaken off their

winter sackcloth and the soil had been tilled and weeded it had been cut up, plowed and turned over, broken and harrowed, and there lay the mighty fields spread out in their different tones of brown earth. Here and there a scarecrow tossed his rags in the wind. The grand work of the fields had begun again for another year. On both sides of the river brown and white horses were slowly drawing the plow through the soil and turned it open in thick clods, like meat that you could bite into. The sowers marched along the fields like kings, throwing their bounty on the earth. They were to be seen on all sides, no bigger than your finger, along the river banks between the trees, under the windmill, and alongside the convent woods, strewing the wonderful grain. Wind and sun blessed it, to begin with; the yielding earth received it into her loins and rejoiced that she might bear again richly and become mother of the million of seeds. Many peasants were planting potatoes, and manure carts were going to and fro, spreading their pungent odor in the air.

Cowslips showed their golden fingers along the brook-side. Pallieter picked a tuft and stuck it in his hat. Cows were out in the meadow again and swallows swept through the air. Shadows of the clouds rolled continuously over the land, in turn with streaks of clear wet sunshine.

Pallieter stood watching and admiring it all. This new splendor filled him with happiness, the sun and wind, the return of spring, this rich full living. How

beautiful, how divine and good it was! Just then he saw a man with a gun creeping after a cock pheasant!

"D—n!" said Pallieter. And he was just going to clap his hands to warn the bird, when the man's hat fell off. Then a good idea seized him and he went quickly to the hat and threw a cake of cow dung into it where it lay. The bird flew off, and the man saw he had lost his hat, looked round, was going to put it on his head, but when he saw what was inside he dropped the hat and stamped on it like a raving idiot and shook his fist at the cows. Pallieter watched him from behind a woodstack and laughed himself to fits.

When he reached home with the withered flowers in his hat the white flag was flying in honor of the fine weather, and Marieke had set the fountain running. It was gayly spurting up its little silver thread of water after a whole winter of imprisonment.

Charlot was in the garden with Marieke, hiding oranges and Easter eggs for Fransoo's children, who were to come and look for them as soon as the church bells began to chime.

Pallieter had stained all the eggs yesterday, all sorts of colors, blood red, butter yellow, blue, and green. Some were speckled, striped, and with curls and twists. There were some with a cock on them, a little man, a

laughing sun or flowers or trees. All were brightly colored and looked like queer fruit among the grass and bushes.

Charlot heaved a sigh of relief when it was all done. "There now, fasting is done with and we shall get the bells ag'in!"

"It an't made you any thinner," laughed Pallieter.

"I've naught to reproach myself wi'," said Charlot, proudly. "I've eat my fill but once a day."

"Ay, but then you were chock-full every time!"

"What!" cried Charlot, indignantly. "An ye grudge me a slice more bread than usual, then I'd as soon turn nun, far liefer than go wi' ye folks into strange places, where there's naught but man-eaters and wild beasts! Ye can be sure o' that, ye greedy pig!"

"Come now," said Marieke, "don't get put out; 'tis only Pallieter's fun."

"I'm not making fun," cried Charlot, snappishly. And she went back to the kitchen. She had left off wearing her cap, and her little knob of hair had come in sight for the whole summer. She wore quite new black, shiny clogs, painted with a yellow bird on a green twig. A bit later she had forgotten all about the little tiff and was singing away:

"I have a little playmate,
A cat as soft as silk . . . !"

Pallieter strolled into the garden with Marieke.

"And through our garden the river is to cut in a straight line. Well 'tis a pity."

"If you want a nice garden, why not come and live in our village? 'Tis pretty there, too, and open to the woods and moorland."

"Nay," said Pallieter. "I feel like a bird and want to live everywhere! Ye'll like to go with me, eh, wifie?" he went on, tenderly.

She lifted up her wide and happy eyes to him, put her arms around his neck, and murmured: "If only I can always be wi' you, ye can take me to the end of the world an ye want to."

They kissed each other tenderly.

Charlot called out that the children were coming, and Marieke tripped away, laughing, to meet them. Pallieter watched her going and said to himself:

"She's my very soul!"

Just then a blackbird began to whistle in an old chestnut tree, and then flew off to the rampart, where the trees were brown with buds and noisy with the chatter of sparrows. In the garden the pear trees were veiled with buds just ready to open, plum trees were turning pink, and the peach trees were in full, rosy bloom.

The soil, vigorous with good tillage, had already

yielded early lettuce, and many flowers were coming out—hyacinths on the little hill where the windmill was perched, and here and there round the fountain scented narcissus. The newly clipped hedge was very pale green.

Pallieter marveled at the speed of the growing things. There was no standing still; everything grew and worked everywhere, worked up out of the ground, burst out of the trees and water; moss fastened on the stones, and fungus to the trees, one sucking life out of the other, all eager to live, all panting to beget and to bear with the irresistible impulse of their new blood. Above him flew a triangle of wild ducks returning from the South. And then all at once the Easter bells pealed out from the town, the village, and the convent, clashing and rejoicing, acclaiming the resurrection of Christ, the renewal of life. The bells had come from Rome and scattered a shower of eggs on to the Earth, and she was animated with a new soul. Spring had come back to the trees with new buds and shoots. Life once more triumphed over death. It was the Resurrection. And Pallieter, moved to the depths of his being, knelt down and kissed the ground.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

THE PROCESSION OF THE CROSSES AND THE BLESSING OF THE FIELDS

HE weather turned sulky again and brought whole days of fine rain, with dull-gray skies. All the same, the trees went on with their work by themselves. One after another they put on their bridal array, and the flowers opened their lips and exhaled their sweet perfumes. The benignant sun kept away; so instead of bursting forth in a rush of luxuriance, greedy to seize the light, the vegetation pushed slowly and cautiously out of the soil.

"It 'll get better," said Pallieter, "when the procession walks, for it is the crosses that open the gates for the steady weather and the fullness of summer. All the nine days before this are of little account and unreliable."

So every one worked on, knowing it could not be otherwise; they waited for the crosses.

And just on the very day when the procession was to go around a change set in—a brisk mild wind got up and came springing over the ground and cleared all the rain clouds off the sky.

The procession started. Pallieter and Charlot went too, Pallieter riding at the end of the procession and overlooking everything. They went into the open fields. The breeze waved out the red banners and played with the women's skirts and the priest's vestments; it scattered the Latin prayers broadcast.

The whole sky was like silver, with heaps of sausage-shaped white clouds throwing out light on all quarters. The seed was already sprouting in the ground.

The solemn Latin chant wafted fitfully over the brown fields, over the bright yellow turnip flowers, along the white and rosy orchards and fragrant gardens.

"Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice, let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications. If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord who shall stand?"

The red-coated acolytes tinkled the bell and swung out the fragrant blue incense. The priest, in his gold-and-purple vestments and his shaven crown, sprinkled the holy water with gracious sweeps of his hand, blessing all the beautiful, fertile country.

The peasants, men and women, held their paternosters open, repeating prayers for their fruit, their cattle and their harvest. Their whole substance lay bare, open to God's great sky. It all depended on the heavens. Heaven, that gave life or death, good or evil, heat or cold, sun and wholesome showers.

Thus they prayed humbly. They spoke for the dumb seed, the trees and fruit: "Hear my prayer, O Lord, give ear to my supplications; in thy faithfulness answer

me, and in thy righteousness . . . For the enemy hath persecuted my soul; he hath smitten my life down to the ground; he hath made me to dwell in darkness as those that have been long dead." It was the prayer of the fruit, the seed, and the trees after the long winter, their enemy. "Quicken me, O Lord, for thy name's sake; for thy righteousness' sake bring my soul out of trouble. And of thy mercy cut off mine enemies, and destroy all them that afflict my soul, for I am thy servant."

The prayer for the produce of the fields. The wind skipped over the earth and caught up the words. Our Lady and all the bright company of saints and angels who inhabit the heavens, those who have the power to hold back the thunder and still the waters and turn the course of the winds, all those saints and martyrs, popes, sinners, apostles, and votaries, even the thousands of innocent children, were now installed as guardians over the people and horned cattle, and over the fruit and the trees. "Ora pro nobis" and "Ora-orate pro nobis" sounded on all sides in a chorus of men's deep voices.

Pallieter joined fervently in the prayers. He felt full of life and brightness, he quivered with spiritual joy, and would gladly have waved flags in the wind. Prayer was too quiet for him, and he lifted up his voice and sang as loudly as he could with the priests; "De profundis clavissima mea Dominum!" When the procession had made the circle of the fields he rode on through the beautiful landscape.

A magnificent sight it was, the blossoming white of the fruit trees. "The milk of earth's breast flowing

over," thought Pallieter, and "The sun will make butter of it!" The big, cheerful wind rushed through the air and boomed away among the trees. It shook the horse's mane and tail and tossed off Pallieter's hat, so that it

flew up like a bird and fell into the rippling water of the Nethe. But Pallieter didn't care; he rode on wild and carelessly, without holding the rein, just to feel the virile pleasure of this rejuvenating wind all through his body. He could see the crosses moving on and on, red and white, along the sandy roads, and all around the windmills made the sign of the cross like the priests' crosses, and away over there the wind blew up a peasant girl's skirt nearly over her head. All at once the sun burst through the clouds and gave life and movement to the color in the fields; it made them all rejoice!

"The crosses have brought a benediction already!" cried Pallieter.

That very same evening the wind went down and a mild warmth descended over the land, and the pear trees spread out all their perfume. The sky became clear as crystal, stars glistened brightly in fresh virgin blue, and low in the sky the waxing moon hung out her slender crescent.

Pallieter and Marieke were leaning out of their bedroom window, half undressed, but the sweetness of the evening kept them still out of bed. Marieke's head lay on Pallieter's shoulder and his arm was round her waist. They were silent, listening to a nightingale hidden in the

canopy of a blossoming cherry tree and dropping golden notes out of his very heart. And then they began to hear the deep, moving tones of a 'cello.

"'Tis the priest," said Pallieter.

"Pity that the convent gate is shut," said Marieke.

"Wait a bit," he replied, eagerly. "Come on. We'll go there in the boat."

They dressed again quickly, went down, and got into the boat; then they rowed down the narrow waterway up to the convent. All the time they could hear the soft, plaintive voice of the 'cello.

They rowed very quietly to the priest's garden, which was screened from the water by a trellis-work with creepers. There they stopped and stood up in the boat to listen. The priest was sitting out of doors under a blossoming cherry tree. They could only see his large head and pale hands in the darkness; and he was playing Schuman's "Träumerei." It was like a prayer; he prayed in his music.

When it came to an end there was a long silence; it seemed a sin to Pallieter to let his voice be heard in this fragrant quietness; but a big sigh escaped him.

The priest looked up and asked, "Is anybody there?"

"It's me!" said Pallieter.

"Then you must come in at once." And he hurried down the garden and opened the little gate in the trellis, which was only opened for the servant to get water.

"Such fine weather," said the priest, "that I was just making a bit of music. Come in!"

"Suppose," said Pallieter, "you bring your 'cello into our boat and we'll row as far as the van Ringen farm."

"Agreed!" said the priest, and he brought his instrument into the boat.

They turned back into the Nethe, and when they came to the open fields he began to play again, while Pallieter steered and Marieke rowed.

The 'cello spoke. It sang like a human voice, it rose as if from the ocean depths, it told of the mysteries of heaven and the delights of the spring. It was Beethoven, Wagner, Palestrina, and Grieg all in one. And the music drifted away over the water and the quiet evening fields, gave them the benediction of the most beautiful music under the sun. It was as if God had set foot upon the earth.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

FERTILITY

ILD and lovely May had now hung all her glories on the trees and spread her riches over the ground. The royal chestnut trees that grew so splendidly about the river Nethe had lighted their white candelabra on their mounds of green foliage. Many candles had been lighted in honor of Our Lady.

Marieke's mother had come, and they went every day with Charlot to one of the little chapels to pray for her good delivery. Her burden was now heavy, but the days passed by and with the new moon, toward the end of June, the child was expected.

That day Pallieter was coming home from Duffel, where he had been to a wagon-maker to order the covered cart in which they were to go out into the world, after the child was born.

The June sun in the bright-blue sky shook out her golden tresses over the whole land.

Pallieter strolled along the river bank, his beautiful Nethe meandering at will through the well-tilled fields and the meadows rich with cattle, rearing her giant

poplars all along her course, and now this splendid pleasant river was to be turned into a stiff and straight canal!

" 'Twill rob the country of its crown," he sighed, "and it breaks my heart to think of it." Then he began to hear the repeated blare of a horn.

"It must be Charlot, to say the child is born!" cried out Pallieter. And he pulled off his boots and began to run as hard as he could. The horn went on blowing, turned east and west without stopping.

Pallieter ran still faster, and cursed himself that he couldn't go more quickly still. Two horses were grazing near, and in a moment he sprang on one of them and holding on to the mane, urged the startled beast full gallop to the Reynaert.

When Charlot saw Pallieter coming she dropped the horn, rushed up to him, pale with excitement:

"Why, lad, lad! 'tis, 'tis three of them—two boys and a girl! First the . . ."

Pallieter hardly listened to her, but ran upstairs, with her after him. He threw open the door, and there on the bed lay Marieke, all pale, and tears ran down her face while her lips were smiling at him. Next to her, three naked rosy little beings were wailing and squeaking the sun shining on their soft flesh through the open window.

Pallieter stood stockstill at first and couldn't believe

his eyes. He was flabbergasted. Marieke's mother and Charlot were out of their wits. One was splashing water about and the other upset a pail and stood scratching her head.

"Are ye pleased?" murmured Marieke.

Then Pallieter's joy overflowed. He came to his dear young wife and kissed her fervently as he said, "Abraham would envy me!" Then he called out joyfully to Charlot: "Fetch me nurses, sponsors, cradles, and comfits! The three heavenly children are born!"

"Ay, ay!" cried Charlot, all of a fluster, and she ran downstairs, but was back again in a minute, shouting hurriedly, "Make haste! Make haste! The priest's here. Put a shirt on 'em all."

"Nay, nay!" said the priest as he came upstairs. "I want to see them as God gave them to Pallieter." And he lifted up his hands in amazement, and then turned to Pallieter and said, "You lucky fellow!" Then to Marieke, "God has been good to you, my girl!" He shook their hands, and when he had given the three infants the baptism the tears came into his eyes. "Continue in this way!" he said.

"I promise 'ee!" cried Pallieter.

"Father," said Marieke, shy and blushing, "the children must have suck!"

"Well, well!" laughed the priest. "Go your way! We are not wanted any more, eh, Pallieter? Let's go and drink to your offsprings."

And while they went downstairs and drank cham-

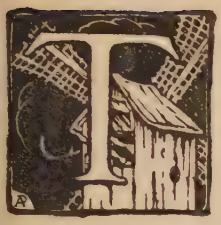
pagne [1] Marieke gave her precious mother milk to th two Pallieter boys, while the Pallieter girl was left t wail.

With the priest's hat on his own head Pallieter and h sat drinking their sixth bottle of champagne in honor o the three he had begotten.

[1] Well-to-do farmers in Flanders always drink champagne on th occasion of a birth.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

OUT INTO THE WORLD



HE covered cart was all ready to start. Nearly all the nuns, the three blind men, a good many novices, and the priest stood round it to bid farewell to the owners of the Reynaert farm.

While Marieke took her place in the cart with her three infants, and Charlot listened devoutly to the priest's good counsel, Pallieter went to fetch the horse that was still grazing in the meadow. Good old Beiaard trotted off playfully toward the dyke when she saw her master coming, but Pallieter caught her up and jumped on to her back. "O Netheland!" he murmured, "ye make it hard to part," as his glance lingered over the landscape. It was afternoon and rain was falling, hesitatingly, in large drops, ceasing at times, then falling lightly again, but it brought a delicious fragrance out of the ground, the flowers, and the hay that was being mown in the meadows all about. Blackbirds, throstles, orioles and finches, tits and wagtails, trilled a cheerful carol from the trees, and among this chorus of amateurs the royal fluting of the nightin-

gale could be heard like a golden flute that hung in the trees and sent out a note as each raindrop touched it.

A halo of well-being hung over the land and a pleasant mildness exhaled from all living things. The sky was of a warm blue-gray, and yonder the horizon was hidden in a misty blue like incense.

"There beyond lies the world!" cried Pallieter, and the thought of that set him all agog to be starting.

"Get in!" he cried to Charlot, coming out of the house with her last treasures.

She stopped, quite overwhelmed now the last parting was come. She looked at all her friends—the nuns, the novices, and the priest—and then burst into loud crying, the tears pouring down her face.

"Oh! Oh!" she said, sobbing. "A would as lief 'a' been a nun, but what 'u'd become of the three mites o' children wi' a young mother like Marieke? Somebody mun help to look after them. Eh?"

"Surely," said all the nuns, and there were tears in their eyes, too.

"Ye can still stay behind an ye will," cried Pallieter as he fastened the last strap in Beiaard's harness.

"Ah," said the priest to Marieke, "however shall I get on without your lad?" shaking his head with a sigh.

"Come, it won't be so bad. There's still Fransoo."

"It's time now!" called out Pallieter to the still sobbing Charlot. "Get in." And he heaved the sack of hay over his shoulder.

"Stop a bit!" said the priest, deeply moved, and he gave Marieke and Pallieter each a crucifix, and raised

himself on his toes to give another to the infants Marieke held out to him; and as she bent her forehead toward him he said: "Young mother, let us hope you may bear many more children. Farewell and God bless ye!" And he turned aside and began to sob in his red handkerchief.

A touching silence fell upon them. Nothing was to be heard but the sobs of the priest and the women. Most likely Pallieter would have wept, too, but he thought better of it and called out with a laugh:

"Who'll go with us? Now then, who'll come? Ye might pick up a Chinese husband. Anybody coming?"

A laugh went up here and there and the priest murmured, "Always the same!"

"Well, no one?" asked Pallieter once more. "The chance is gone! I'll marry Charlot to a nigger and her children can become nuns, little black nuns!"

"Pallieter, my lad, may it go well wi' 'ee," said the priest, and they kissed each other.

"Drink a glass to us!" called out Pallieter.

"I will—two," replied the priest.

Loebas barked impatiently. Yonder was the blue distance and the wide world!

Pallieter longed to set out, and cried, "Gee up!" in spite of Charlot, who was trying to shake hands with every nun and every novice.

And away went the cart. An infant cried. Marieke gave it the breast.

"I'm a-comin'! I'm a-comin'!" cried Charlot, and she left the nuns and ran as hard as she could after the cart.

Pallieter, who was walking alongside, gave her a good push up behind, and then she thrust her red face out of the cover and waved to the nuns, who stood in a group, calling and waving their handkerchiefs. The three blind men lifted up their sticks in the wrong direction, the priest waved his hat, and Pallieter cracked loudly with his whip.

"Out into the world!" he cried. "Out into the world!"

And behold! Peter, the stork, came swooping out of the sky and walked after the cart. Pallieter burst out laughing at him and wanted to stroke him and praise him, but Peter flew up on to the cover of the cart and perched thoughtfully with his beak in his feathers. Loebas ran on in front barking.

Away went the cart over the convent rampart, while the rain fell gently. . . .

Fransoo and his wife stood waiting for them at the mill. Here Pallieter drew up, and they drank two bottles of old wine beside the cart.

"Ye'll ha' fine weather!" said Fransoo. "This rain is like a salve to the ground."

And Charlot warned Pallieter, "Put on yer coat, do; yer shirt is soaked through."

"Every drop as falls on it is sweet as a maiden's kiss," said Pallieter, and he let his shirt get wet and liked it.

"Where be 'ee goin' to first of all?" asked Fransoo.

"The way my cap shews me," replied Pallieter, and he threw up his cap, which fell towards south-east.

"Toward the sun," he said, cheerfully.

"And then?"

And Pallieter called back, chanting: "Holland, Norway, Spain, Ice and Sun-land, to Jericho, or halfway to hell, to the land of Do-as-you-like, to the land of the apes. Follow my nose all the way! Good-by!"

Peter came inside the cart. They all kissed one another good-by.

"Come here, Fatima!" laughed Fransoo, and he smacked kiss after kiss on Charlot's red cheeks.

Charlot scrambled back into the cart, red to the roots of her hair with fury.

"We are off eastwards," called out Pallieter, and as soon as Marieke was seated again in the cart the vehicle started again along the highroad that wound southward through the fields and meadows.

They waved and shouted once more to one another, and a moment later Fransoo and his wife were up in one of the highest windows of the mill, waving their handkerchiefs to them.

Yonder lay the blue distance and the great wide world. Pallieter, walking beside the cart, with the blue bag over his shoulder, was joyful with excitement. At last all the world was before him; it lay there beyond him, bright and peaceful, like a Paradise.

Meadows full of mowers, humming with the swish of scythes, and fields bright with cattle; above them the pearly atmosphere slowly dropping rain that drew out the sweet odors of the ground. Cocks were crowing.

And behind him was the Netheland, where he had lived for years, whose beauty he would carry in his heart forever.

He stood still to look at it and let the cart go on. The windmill turned its red sails above the trees. The convent sheltered peacefully behind the huge trees on the rampart, and beyond that stretched the fields and the farms; sheep were grazing and flocks of geese moving about; and in its dykes above the meadows the river was winding its way, carrying its barges along with it. Pigeons were flying around.

"Hurrah, O Land!" shouted Pallieter, and he took up a handful of the earth and put it into his pocket. "'Tis

sacred ground!" he murmured, and then turned round and looked at the immense convent woods, the blue distance, the wide world. He picked up a cock's feather and stuck it in his hat and, careless as a child, he went after the white-covered cart that was jogging along the highroad in front of him.

Far and wide spread the broad valley of the Nethe, under a pale-gray sky at times dripping rain.

In all this immensity the houses looked like ant hills, the woods were flat, villages and hamlets with their windmills were small and insignificant; still smaller were the people, spotted about the picture—laborers busy with the active summer work. Piled up hay carts rumbled along the roads; carts went to and fro, and folks hurried about and along the river that sauntered through the fertile land in big shining loops; the boats appeared to be motionless, while a little black railway train crawled along slowly, waving a long white plume of smoke behind it. The whole region exhaled a rich smell like incense, and all at once the sun burst out in the west in pale, mighty beams and lighted up the villages; windmills caught the brightness, and over all this splendid, prosperous country a rainbow arch appeared glistening with unparalleled glory.

The world rejoiced! . . .

And behold! yonder, far away, on the clear south, a white speck, was the tilt-cart moving under the mighty span of the rainbow.

. . . . . .

Thus went away Pallieter, the happy seeker,[1] away from the land of the Nethe, out into the beautiful wide world, as the birds do, and the wind.

[1] *Dagenmelker* in the original, literally one who milks all the enjoyment he can out of the day. *Huisjesmelker* is one who milks all the money he can out of house property.

THE END

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Timmermans

Pallieter